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German 4999: Undergraduate Research Thesis

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Falk Richter's *I Am Europe*: Challenging German Identity and Eurocentric Elitism in the Era of Mass Migration

Ich Bin Europa (*I Am Europe)* is a set of theatrical works written by contemporary German playwright Falk Richter throughout the course of the 2010s, then assembled and published in 2017. The five plays included in *I Am Europe* are avant-garde commentaries on the political unrest and societal transformation of Germany's most recent decade. In this collection, Richter wholly rejects conventional narrative, abandoning clear-cut plots in favor of fragmented series of theatrical tools and defamiliarized text. He weaponizes an avant-garde assembly of soliloquies, dialogues, recycled talking points, multimedia clips, and interviews from protests, drawn largely from right-wing political movements. In abandoning customary forms of storytelling, Richter follows in the aesthetic footsteps of notable German avant-garde playwrights, like Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller, who also created political and social interventionist theater in Germany throughout the 20th century.

In the first work of the collection, *FEAR*, the characters Alina and Bernardo engage in a fast-paced dialogue where they continuously ask if the other still loves them. Both individuals beg for constant reassurance that everything has remained the same and nothing has changed since the last time one of the two professed their love. After several lines of these characters berating one another with rapid-fire questions, such as "liebst du mich noch?" "jetzt ist die Liebe noch da?" and "bist du sicher?", Alina expresses of all her frustrations at once:

"ALLES IST ANDERS ODER ALLES VERÄNDERT SICH DOCH GERADE DIE GANZE ZEIT DA ÄNDERT SICH DOCH ALLES ÄNDERT SICH DOCH GERADE." [1]

The artistic technique of defamiliarization occurs when an author or artists depicts a familiar concept in an abstract or strange way. Artists defamiliarize different components of their work in order to challenge their audience's perception of real objects or ideas, and they use defamiliarized language, visuals, or performance to lengthen and refine the process through which audience members comprehend the concepts in the artwork. This quotation in *FEAR* serves as an example of defamiliarization in multiple ways, such as the elimination of all punctuation, which removes structure, rhythm, and expression of emotion. Uniform use of capital letters implies that there are no variations in cadence or tone throughout the line. Each figure in *FEAR*, including Alina, is named after the actor/actress who plays the role, and this aspect of the play serves as a defamiliarizing feature in the way that it blurs the lines between staged character and real individual.

The structure of this line exemplifies one of many instances of capitalized text throughout the play. Richter's decision to capitalize large pieces of text refers to a particular form of political discourse that dominates social media – posting entirely in capital letters that break through users' feeds in aggressive demands for attention. This is just one of many moments where Richter stages internet discussion, and this technique of reimagining online exchanges as spoken dialogue makes the concept of digesting information from these forums less comfortable and acceptable for the audience. By bringing political internet discourse to the stage, *I Am Europe* exposes the ways in which emotionally charged anecdotes are spread more impulsively and at a

[1] Richter, Falk. "FEAR," in *Ich Bin Europa* (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 43.
Translated: "EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT OR EVERYTHING IS CHANGING THE WHOLE TIME IT'S ALL CHANGING EVERYTHING IS CHANGING."

faster pace. Instantaneous acceptance of new opinions and belligerent reactions become less satisfying for the audience when such discourse is presented in person. It becomes more evident that an individual who makes a racist remark in the presence of other people, who may or may not be like-minded, will more likely face scrutiny than if they were to make the same remark in an online forum where the discomfort of emotional responses from others is no longer is a possibility. [2] The staging of political internet discussion, therefore, presses the audience to contemplate the lack of critical and consequential thinking that social media discourse requires.

Alina channels this digital version of "scream-discourse" and stages it a thoughtless string of words that illustrates her deep fear of instability. She does not cleanly explain her inner desire to avoid big changes in her life, home, and surroundings; rather, she screams a frustrating revelation of her innermost thoughts with no breaks for punctuation, another aesthetic quality of unregulated digital conversation, from text messages to online forum posts. Thus, *FEAR* makes its characters' specific social-psychological states less identifiable, namely through Alina presenting a defamiliarized expression of her most impulsive and deep-seated reactions to the indefinite shifts in society. A simple analysis of her "scream-discourse" concludes that Alina is upset, because her homeland changing forever; however, an analysis that leans into the defamiliarized text does not adhere to a definitive emotion. It applies her statements about broad "change" to the contexts of both her personal relationships and the widespread identifiable changes in German society. In staging political intervention, the text of *I Am Europe* employs the actors' shockingly honest, stream-of-consciousness outbursts – rather than a straight-forward monologue – as a way to demand that the audience confront their own conventional and compartmentalized outlooks on the current state of Europe. This avant-garde approach to radical

[2] Zúquete, J. P. "The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3. (2008): 321–344.

artmaking forces the audience into an exploratory space, where everything is intentionally broken down into its most primitive features, and where the art must be confronted on no terms other than its own. The unconventional text of *I Am Europe* wants every type of person to encounter a newfound discomfort and dissatisfaction in the traditional European lens through which they view the modern world.

This thesis interprets Richter's attempt to "zoom in" on the political nexus of the 2010s. My analysis of *I Am Europe* shows Richter's critique to be concerned with nationalist xenophobia but also with a worldview that assumes Europe to be the utopic wellspring of tolerance and peace while remaining blind to its history of violence and oppression. His text confronts people from every political background about both knowingly and unknowingly perpetuating what I will argue is Eurocentric elitism. Of course, Richter's actors put the white supremacist, German nationalist AfD (Alternativ für Deutschland) politicians on full display to acquaint the audience with the seemingly obvious danger their ideologies pose in relation to Germany's fascist past and endangered present. However, Richter's characters portray the "types" that he believes to be more dominant in German society, who possess either 1) a hidden assumption of white, Christian European identity as the ideal (and all other identities as a deviation), or 2) a common European form of elitism, which I will define as a self-serving cosmopolitan perspective that preaches tolerance and peace in order to mask internalized every-day biases. Like Alina, whose compounding fears of change in her relationship with Bernardo culminate in a revelation about her underlying fear of a rapidly changing society, characters throughout all five plays demonstrate an almost violent self-assurance in their enlightenment. In *I Am Europe*, no character possesses a true, comprehensive, and unproblematic understanding of the societal challenges that face Germany – and Europe as a whole – in the age of the refugee crisis. All

parties are guilty of rejecting changing societies, fearing immigrants, preserving age-old forms of oppression, mindlessly consuming media, and spiraling towards impulsive, innate desires to feel comfort and safety in their homeland – whatever that looks like from them.

In this thesis, I consistently use the terms "Germany" and "Europe" to describe two locations characterized by shared culture, heritage, and experience; in some instances, it may seem that I use the two terms almost interchangeably, so in order to avoid a lack of clarity in my argument, I will provide working definitions of the two locations. Germany is a central European country that has accepted more than one million refugees and bore the weight of most European asylum efforts in 2010s. The nation of Germany has always prided itself on its artistic, cultural, and intellectual contributions to Western society. As a people, the Germans also revel in their nation's growth over the past several decades; this country with a difficult history has become one of the biggest political and economic European powers in the twenty-first century. *I Am Europe* stages contemporary Germany, a nation and people struggling to understand its identity in the midst of growing ethnic and racial diversity. Richter's collection of diverse characters, and his approach to staging their fears, disturbs any remaining beliefs about the existence of a single "German identity." For centuries, Europe was a landmass composed of predominantly white and Christian nations. Powerful institutions, like the Catholic Church and ruling monarchies, defined Europe's religious and social homogeny for much of history. Over the past few decades, rising levels of immigration from former European colonies in the global South have caused the population to become significantly multicultural. Through the practice of defamiliarization, variations in textual format, and performance of impulsive discourse, *I Am Europe* dislodges self-certainty of arguments in favor of "preserving" the homogenous Europe of the past. Such arguments are deconstructed through the text's investigation of Europe's undisclosed violent,

intolerant, and elitist nature, a thorough examination that spans the length of all five plays in the collection.

Richter is one of the most prominent and innovative contemporary playwrights in the twenty-first century German theater scene. He follows in the tradition of German authors and artists who wrote politically-disruptive pieces for the audiences of Europe – works about revolution, social issues, and nationalism. Richter includes some of these artists and their work throughout his plays as references to the game-changing contributions to the German social scene. In his view, these writers and creators were able to break through the mainstream mindsets of their day in order to stage blanket critiques of their historical eras. [3] Friedrich Hölderlin, a poet in the age of the French Revolution, deviated from his peers – like Friedrich Schiller – who adhered to the aesthetics and themes of Weimar Classicism; he instead embraced the turbulence of the fractured Napoleonic era. [4] Writing in the style of ancient Greek poets and referring to the original Enlightenment of antiquity, Hölderlin used the rhetoric and imagery of heroic Ancient Greece to express his love for a unified German nation that did not yet exist in a time when domineering foreign powers kept it more disbanded than ever before. Richter also draws influence from Bertolt Brecht, the twentieth century playwright who contrasted the emotionalism of the German expressionist movement through a more eclectic and realist approach to theater, insofar that he introduced socialist and class-conscious critique to the theatrical scene of the democratic, but instable Weimar Republic. [5] Brecht also contributed to the wave of *Exilliteratur* as a communist

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[3] Remshardt, Ralf. "The Postdramatic Paradox: Theater as an Interventionist Medium in Falk Richter's *Das System*" in *Envisioning Social Justice in Contemporary German Culture*, ed. Jill E. Twark and Axel Hildebrandt. (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), 227-252.

[4] Hölscher, Stefanie. "Schiller and Hölderlin: From Beauty to Religion." *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 75, no. 2. (2006): 83-94. Hölderlin diverged from Schiller's philosophies that concluded that human enlightenment was driven by the discovery of beauty and aesthetic; the former poet developed his own theories that instead emphasized the roles of religion and spirituality in the process of enlightenment.

[5] Patterson, Michael. "Brecht's Debt to Theatrical Expressionism." *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 66, no. 1 (January 2009): 93–99.

fugitive outside of Germany during the years of the Third Reich, and although he eventually identified as a Marxist, he was critical of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the early years of the German Democratic Republic. An entire play in *I Am Europe* is centered around the legacy of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who made critical films about life in post-fascist West Germany. Fassbinder was part of a generation of West Germans who were staunchly critical of their parents' roles in the rise of the Third Reich, and while the national movement towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was widely considered a necessary good, Fassbinder also challenged those who bore so much anger for past fascism, yet perpetuated the dominance of white-ness and ethnic German-ness as Germany diversified with the arrival of guest workers from the Middle East and Asia – such films include *Katzelmacher* (1969) and *Ali: Angst Essen Seele Auf* (1974). [6] Finally, Richter's work draws influence from Heiner Müller – another East German playwright – whose plays warned against any perceived vitality of "Fortress Europe." In staging dissent against the less communist/more authoritarian SED and the climate East Germany at the Wende, Müller's tradition of self-critique was brutal, leaving no stone unturned on his mission to dismantle European orthodoxies and his audience's security in their Enlightenment as theater-goers. Years before Richter came onto the theater scene, Müller was critically invested in the identity of Germany, informing his work with ideas from a lineage of artists and writers who committed their work to social disruption in Germany. [7] Richter, like these artists, does not reimagine works from the European tradition, as Hölderlin translated the ancient Greek poet Pindar, Brecht re-envisioned John Gay's eighteenth-century *The Beggar's Opera,* and Müller reworked Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* I present the legacies of Hölderlin, Brecht, Fassbinder, and

[6] Chin, Rita. *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Chin uses Elsaesser's *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* as a fundamental source in her sections about Fassbinder.

[7] Barnett, David. *Heiner Müller's The Hamletmachine*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Müller in order to show that the commentary in Richter's plays is a continuation of questions posed by the German artists who cut through social and political certainties of their time – questions about unified German identity, stability of the political system, fear of foreigners, and the durability of European peace. Richter adapts these questions around the context of the twenty-first century.

Richter directs and writes his avant-garde performances for contemporary Germany, a nation of immigration, economic prosperity, advanced technology, and surfacing far-right politics. His first successful works were fictional plays that addressed pertinent social issues of the new millennium, such as increased state surveillance, the "warlike" nature of capitalism, and lack of societal trust after the European economic crisis of 2009. Richter became well-known for his writing and directorial work for plays like *Unter Eis* (2004) and *Das System* (2004), in which both characters and the audience become aware of the deterministic structures that govern ostensibly "civilized" Western societies. One of his most prominent early plays, TRUST (2009) – or *Trust Me* when adapted for an American audience – has characters play off the concept of eroded "trust" in the twenty-first century. The play combines monologues, scenes, and strings of provocative statements to cultivate pessimism about Western capitalistic culture. Each one of these early theatrical pieces depicts the ways in which all people in the West constantly fear they will be exploited by the people in their lives, from their company's CEO to their romantic partner. [8] The playwright expounds an overarching vision for his works of the 2000s in an exchange with sociologist Richard Sennett, remarking that "permanent distrust creates a paranoid situation for everybody. One is constantly confronted with the question: 'Is this person going to

[8] Illouz, Eva and Falk Richter. "You can't trust profiles - a conversation between Falk Richter and Eva Illouz." *Falk Richter: Playwright, Director*. 1 January 2009. http://www.falkrichter.com/EN/about/

gain some advantage at my expense?'" [9] This observation remains relevant in Richter's theatrical approach to a new decade that added to the financial crisis and heightened political unrest amid social and demographic changes. Using influences from both other German writers and his own works, Richter takes on this decade in *I Am Europe*.

The 2010s saw the mass migration of Middle Eastern refugees to Europe after the Arab Spring and outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2019, Germany accepted more refugees than any other European country; the German government admitted more than one million asylum seekers during 2015 and 2016, causing a significant change in the country's ethnic makeup. [10] Richter found new creative inspiration in the massive societal transformation and mass arrival of migrants that confronted his homeland. Where he had once written broadly of the pitfalls of Western culture and identity, Richter began to concentrate his dramatic works on the culture and tension of Germany's social instability in the present day, targeting especially the behavior, psychology, and Eurocentric outlook of skeptical ethnic Germans. In his works, Richter uses his homeland Germany as center stage for the fundamentally changing European continent, examining the political, cultural, and demographic unrest of the refugee crisis in both Germany and larger Europe.

The collection *I Am Europe* consists of five different plays written in the late 2010s and debuted on various stages throughout Germany. In this thesis, I will present an analysis of the political and social commentary in each play of *I Am Europe*. Directed by Richter himself, the

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[9] Richter, Falk, and Richard Sennett. "The system of social communication failed completely - Falk Richter in conversation with Richard Sennett" or "Das System sozialer Kommunikation versagte auf ganzer Linie - Ein Gespräch zwischen Falk Richter und Richard Sennett." *Theater der Zeit.* January 2013. http://www.falkrichter.com/EN/article/57

[10] "Germany: Fact Sheet." *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.* 15 Feb. 2019. https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2019/02/2019_02_Factsheet_GermanyQ12.pdf

first play – called *FEAR* – premiered in 2015 on the Schaubühne, one of Berlin's most experimental and high-profile theaters. In my reading of this collection, *FEAR* sets the stage for the rest of *I Am Europe*, because it broadly addresses the consequences of and dangers posed by both conscious and unconscious media-driven consumption of right-leaning ideas; the play dedicates limited amounts of time to themes surrounding artistic response to political unrest, the historical influences of Europe's institutions, changes in racial and ethnic makeup of the continent, and cosmopolitan identities of non-conformity. Richter uses the subsequent plays in the collection to elaborate on and investigate some of the more targeted points he made in *FEAR*, and for this reason, I will use later sections of this thesis to analyze these themes. My readings of each play will provide evidence that the following points are the main functions *I Am Europe*. First, this collection opposes the belief that Europe is the world's safe haven, a place of tolerance, peace and prosperity that contrasts an otherwise violent and "backwards" world. Second, Richter's plays reject the idea that most Europeans are certain in their political views and completely adhere to certain binaries or movements. Third, *I Am Europe* invalidates the concept that "whiteness" and "Christianity" are defining traits of twenty-first century Europe. And finally, the collection questions the assumption the landscapes of cosmopolitan Germany are populated by "enlightened" individuals whose worldviews are without problems or prejudices.

FEAR: Instant Information and the Revitalization of the Right in Germany

At the beginning of his summary of *FEAR*, Richter explains: "Western societies live in an equal state of fear and activism." This statement, however, only partially reflects the breadth of the attitudes and beliefs presented for the audience's consideration in this play. Composed of

fragmented monologues, conversations, multimedia clips, and reenactments, *FEAR* is centered around the wishes, worries, and prejudices of the characters, who share their actors' names (this is a common theme in all five plays). These characters are white ethnic Germans on individual journeys to process mentally the fundamental changes in the country. Each person has a different working perspective on those changes – from more resistant to more tolerant – and no character stands wholly at one end of that binary. [11] Some characters are young and not particularly politically minded; however, they still consume politically-charged information from the unavoidable virtual storm of vetted and unvetted news. Other characters are young and easily drawn to common right-wing talking points, such as "Germany is for Germans" and "*Ausländer raus*." Beyond that, *FEAR* also gives attention and space to one middle-aged character who laments the loss of former East Germany. This figure, Kay, has the ability to draw parallels from significant political times in German history. His presence prompts a sudden pause in the incessant influx of information throughout the play, because his contributions to the performance, while sometimes problematic, are driven by historical context and lived experience, rather than personal anecdotes and news cycles.

FEAR grapples with the meaning of home and homeland, zeroing in on the characters' relationships to the people around them and their insecurities about how societal changes will impact their lives. Richter shows these figures acquiring, processing, and spreading information, and incorporates their sources – social media, sensationalized news, and group-think – into the performance on big screens and through the dialogue. In *FEAR*, no character is too secure in their "enlightenment" or too convinced in their "radicalization." As the performers critique

[11] Richter includes dancers and performers of color in his plays; however, because the shows are often addressing Germany's demographic changes from the perspectives of those whose ancestors have lived in Germany for generations. In other adaptations of Richter's works across Germany, the casts have included actors of color who are German.

figures on all political sides, the text establishes an unintelligible complexity of thought in the twenty-first century that defies simplification and compartmentalization. Throughout *FEAR*, and each play in the collection, the audience cannot predict a character's words or beliefs; the text rejects the notion that contemporary ideologies are organized in straight lines, because people consume information through unorganized practices that don't allow for thorough personal inquiry.

FEAR elicited controversy with its staging. Even in a contemporary European theater scene that is usually receptive to boundary-pushing, critics did not think much of Richter's new theatrical direction. *Financial Times* reporter Ian Shuttleworth rates the play two stars out of five, writing, "Richter's method is broadly postdramatic: he is more concerned with eliciting a response from the audience than with saying something in particular. *FEAR* also demonstrates that mentioning something is not the same as talking about it." [12] In Shuttleworth's opinion, *FEAR* spreads itself too thin and gives the audience too much material to allow for proper digestion. The author also laments what he sees as a common trait of new political performances: "As so often with pieces which take such an approach, it's not a matter of demanding that it provide answers so much as hoping forlornly that an at least semi-articulated question might crop up at some point." [13] Shuttleworth claims that it is fairly easy for the audience to figure out what Richter is trying to do with his work, but because the playwright attempts to cover so many manifestations of fear in twenty-first century life, the viewers cannot walk away with much. In another review, *Taz* writer Astrid Kaminski argues that the performance's aesthetics distract from the content of the play:

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[12] Shuttleworth, Ian. "Fear, Schaubühne, Berlin: 'Elusive'." The Financial Times. 27 October 2015. https://www.ft.com/content/6fc2bb4e-7c97-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e

[13] Shuttleworth, Ian. "Fear, Schaubühne, Berlin: 'Elusive'." *The Financial Times.* 27 October 2015. https://www.ft.com/content/6fc2bb4e-7c97-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e

> Nur dass der Abend nicht über die Möblierung hinauskommt. Denn der tiefe Griff in die Zitatekiste von Pegida, AfD und Leuten wie Beatrix von Storch, Gabriele Kuby oder Birgit Heike Kelle kommt nicht viel weiter, als die Bühne mit Parolen wie „Heimatliebe statt Marokkanerdiebe“ auszustatten, engagiert dümmliche Positionierungen der Lächerlichkeit zu überführen, fundamentalistische Panikmache zu exzerpieren und mit dramatischen Beats zu unterlegen. [14]

FEAR is a sensory overload with no one single, deeply pervasive point that audiences can take away from the performance, Kaminski asserts. She concludes her review by stating, “So bleibt diesem Theaterabend nicht viel mehr als unterhaltender Alarmismus.” Further reviews generate verdicts that mirror Shuttleworth’s and Kaminski’s concerns about *FEAR*. *Die Welt* critic Katharina Röben does not dismiss all parts of the show as pointless. She applauds the performative elements of Richter’s work, but, like other critics, finds no deeper understanding of contemporary Germany in *FEAR*: “Das liefert zwar keine Antworten, ist aber herrlich komisch, albern und performative.” [15] Certain scenes in *FEAR* build up to climaxes that should express something profound, Röben writes, but fall short of making a point that resonates with a general audience. The sets, in the critic’s opinion, as well as a propensity for clowning, frequently overpower the social critique: “In dem Moment, in dem eine Antwort, ein Ausblick notwendig wäre, verfällt die Inszenierung ins Slapstickhafte mit Hippietum im Urban-Gardening-Paradies und Massen von Neonröhren.” Finally, Röben even sees a bit of danger in the conclusion of *FEAR*. She believes that Richter spent too much time having his actors ridicule the far-right, and

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[14] Kaminski, Astrid. “*FEAR* an der Schaubühne Berlin: Nazis, Islamisten und Vampire.” *Taz*. 27 October 2015. https://taz.de/Fear-an-der-Schaubuehne-Berlin/!5245158/

[15] Röben, Katharina. “Zschäpe und die anderen Zombies: Falk Richters ‘Fear’.” *Die Welt*. 27 October 2015. https://www.welt.de/print/welt_kompakt/kultur/article148065706/Zschaepe-und-die-anderen-Zombies-Falk-Richters-Fear.html

the audience doesn't walk away with clear understanding of the real threat that right-wing extremism poses to Germany. Röben gives a nod to Richter's undermining of the nationalist right's platforms, but she thinks that he failed to communicate the seriousness of the situation to his viewers: "Doch verkennt der Ansatz, die Anhänger dieser Bewegung als primitiv und dumm abzustempeln, nicht gerade die Gefahr?" Overall, critics recognized certain valuable means of unpacking the current state of Germany in *FEAR*, but they often believed that Richter failed to fully investigate one compelling theme or provide the Schaubühne-goers with enlightening takeaways.

The reaction, however, of leaders on the political right indicated, at the very least, that Richter's work was disturbing enough for their cause that they decided to try to muzzle it. In 2015, *FEAR* made national headlines when one leading *Alternativ für Deutschland* politician, Gabriele Kuby, took Richter and the Berliner Schaubühne to court, claiming violation of a constitutional right to privacy. This case, counter to the far-right's intentions, broadcast the larger question of artistic censorship and free expression – *Kunstfreiheit* - in a rapidly-intensifying political climate. Kuby, an influential figure in the Catholic political machine within the AfD, is one of the specific figures that FEAR quite literally puts on display for the audience to rebuke. [16] Several characters take deliberate aim at Kuby, exposing her extreme views on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. In response, Kuby accused Richter and the Schaubühne of character assassination; however, her charges backfired. [17] The courts sided with the playwright, and *FEAR*'s case became a new landmark decision in favor of freedom of expression during Germany's twenty-

[16] Laudenbach, Peter. "Aufregung um Theaterstück: AfD-Populisten wollen keine Zombies sein." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. 12 November 2015. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/aufregung-um-theaterstueck-afd-populisten-wollen-keine-zombies-sein-1.2730315

[17] Caldwell, Simon. "Is this Germany's most hated woman?" *Catholic Herald*. 6 July 2017. https://catholicherald.co.uk/is-this-germanys-most-hated-woman/

first century wave of political turbulence. Richter ultimately put the court case behind him and continued to write contentious avant-garde plays that controversially unraveled the complexity of European identity.

In regards to Röben's claims that *FEAR* fails to impart any new wisdom to its audience, I argue that "educating" the public is not the play's purpose. There is no need for the performance to enlighten the audience about the mere existence of the far-right in Germany, because their presence is not new. *FEAR* is more concerned that far-right talking points are becoming mainstream; there is a very real possibility that the audience has heard these parroted quotes before. Therefore, the show presents information about far-right politics through tactics of defamiliarization, as previously detailed. The text deconstructs extreme right-wing political beliefs into their alienated problematic elements. For example, *FEAR* and the rest of *I Am Europe* depicts the extreme consequences of consuming information in a society where critical thought is not exercised. The breaking down of these ideologies also insists on self-critique and questions individuals' elitist perceptions of their own tolerance and lack of prejudice. It is not worth measuring how successful Richter's attempt at social disruption was. To many artistically-minded Germans, the lawsuit against FEAR embodied the contemporary "battle" against the censorship of free expression in an age of resurging extremist politics. [18] The fact that a national high-profile lawsuit was employed in order to silence Richter and the Schaubühne indicates that *FEAR* was disruptive – if not to average German citizens, then to the very politicians whose talking points were criticized by the performance.

[18] Pearson, Joseph. "FEAR and the German Far Right: Conversations with Falk Richter." *Schaubühne Theorie*. 23 June 2016. https://www.schaubuehne.de/de/blog/fear-and-the-german-far-right-conversations-with-falk-richter.html?offset=70&offset=30

This section of the thesis will establish *FEAR* as the instigator of the subsequent plays in *I Am Europe,* showing that this show lays out Richter's concerns about the state of Germany and greater Europe today, which the later works elaborate. *FEAR* examines the widespread anxieties and uncertainties that drive average Europeans to the far-right talking points of the twentieth-century; the play also investigates the forces, such as the mindless consumption of instant information, that lead individuals to identify with far-right sentiments. In my analyses of these plays, I will show that the avant-garde devices that Richter uses interweave that rhetoric in the fabric of the text. *FEAR* can be viewed as the master text of the *I Am Europe* collection, but goes further than the other plays in its integration of multimedia clips, as well as its use of the actors to replicate violent protests and parrot radical thoughts onstage.

A scene towards the beginning of the play, entitled "*Wutbürger*" (Angry Citizens), introduces the alienating consequences of emulating violent riots in close proximity to the audience. In this scene, the characters Tilman and Bernardo lead the rest of the actors in a reenacted protest, where the actors scream capitalized lines of dialogue and chant in order to replicate the rhetoric of a chaotic protest in the streets. Such scenes filled with screaming and rioting across the stage could be reasons why some dismissed the entire show as entertaining alarmism; however, the practice of staging violence directly in front of the audience undermines the argument that Europe is a "safe" place in the world, which is an unfamiliar thought for many. While they argue that refugees from war-torn countries in the Middle East and North Africa are bringing their conflicts with them, the protestors produce the exact types of violence that they are allegedly fighting to keep out of Germany. [19] In *FEAR*, rioting is the closest a character gets to fully adhering to one isolated end of the political spectrum. The violent spectacle of "*Wutbürger*" only

[19] Kurthen, Hermann and Michael Minkenberg. "Germany in Transition: Immigration, Racism and the Extreme Right." *Nations and Nationalism,* 1, no. 2 (1995): 175-196.

lasts one scene, because the play is more concerned with the "types" of Germans who have not or will not translate their thoughts about twenty-first century Germany into physical action.

FEAR is more interested in analyzing the journey of "average German" who is mentally processing the social and demographic changes in their country; these figures are not involved in physical violence, but they do enable the persistence of dangerous prejudices in German society. The characters perpetuate stereotypes that villainize ethnic minorities in Germany, they complain about people in the country not pulling their weight, and they shout about how easy they believe it is to migrate to present-day Germany from war zones. The perpetuation of such ideas about foreigners and migrants – the enabling of xenophobia to exist – creates the possibility that "average Germans" will rationalize the physical violence that emerges when certain social groups are antagonized. *FEAR* delineates both the physical violence and the almost-lazy enabling of harmful ideas by the apolitical types. The play illustrates – but does not simplify – the progression from passive observation of change in Germany to active aggression against the change. The portrayal of every action along the spectrum, from obnoxious rioting to quiet contemplation, provides the audience with an opportunity to consider the "processing" journey from afar and recognize each step of the trail to fully buying into far-right philosophies; such a tactic opens the door for self-critique and challenges audience members to identify themselves on the spectrum. The yelling, chanting, and parroting of right-wing talking points could seem like little more than entertaining alarmism to viewers, but the right-leaning characters' underlying purpose is to refute claims that Germany is the wellspring of peace and tolerance. In dismissing *FEAR* as a chaotic display of screaming and rioting, critics and audience members align themselves with the elitist attitudes that *I Am Europe* seeks to undermine. When the characters reenact a protest – a real riot like the acts that have ravaged German towns with

refugee populations and put people at risk – they clarify that violent conflict is not thousands of miles away – it is now a common occurrence in a European country that has long been considered "safe." Later parts of *FEAR* and other works in *I Am Europe* rebuke the elitist attitudes of onlookers who conclude that such violence is "entertaining" or "fascinating."

One particular scene makes repeated appearances throughout different plays in the collection. In *FEAR*, the scene is presented in the form of a monologue that shares the collection's name: "I Am Europe." During this part of the performance, the character Lise speaks as Europe in a woman's body, adhering to the archaic allegorical tradition of Europe being a female entity. [20] She portrays the continent's past and present by reciting the collective memory and legacy of the many European lands in short, matter-of-fact statements. The scene takes no time to explain the meaning or background of Europe's major feats; it lays out a compilation of facts that give simple answers to the questions of what is Europe is and where it has been.

Drawing a common thread between all the pieces of the collection, Richter includes a similarly arranged scene in most of the four plays following *FEAR*. In *Je Suis Fassbinder*, the lines of "Ich Bin Europa" are divided between all five characters – Stan, Laurent, Judith, Eloise, and Thomas – and recited as a mirage of voices. In *Citta del Vaticano*, "Ich Bin Europa" becomes a dialogue between the characters, who embody different "types" of Europeans and their qualities. *Safe Places* sees the monologue split up into smaller scenes – spoken by a figure named Europa – in a series called "Festung Europa," and each scene serves to emphasize the play's challenging of the idea that Europe is a peaceful land, purposefully distinct from all other parts of the world. [21]

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[20] Shirley, Rodney. "Allegorical Images of Europe in Some Atlas Titlepages, Frontispieces, and Map Cartouches." *Belgeo* 3, no. 4 (2008): 341–54.

[21] *Verräter* is the one play that does not contain an adaptation of *I Am Europe*. This play is inherently different from the others in that it focuses more on the individuals and their lived experiences, rather than the collective German identity.

"I Am Europe" reimagines the allegoric tradition of Europe as a female character, rather than a subject of discussion amongst characters in another scene. Lise's concise statements don't follow any particular order or pattern. The text presents these remarks as indisputable facts; there is no discussion between characters or emotional plea to the audience, but there are truths offered up for consideration. Lise begins by listing off some statistics:

> I am twelve stars
>
> I'm 47 territories
>
> I am 742 million people
>
> I am 150 languages on one continent – only 23 of
>
> them are "official" (37)

She sets the stage with these numbers, putting her later statements into context. The play is no longer addressing Germany specifically, rather all of Europe, a large landmass with many shared qualities and experiences. As she continues, Lise/Europa complicates her history, claiming to be the birthplace of Western culture, society, and thought yet noting that that birth has been accompanied by (world) wars, imperialist conquest and colonial occupation, genocides, and white supremacy. Refugees from the Middle East and Africa risk their lives to get to any number of European countries, because it is perceived to be a peaceful, tolerant, and prosperous part of the world. Europe, however, is not a monolith; while most of the popular is traditionally white and Christian, the continent is also composed of diverse cultures, languages and nationalities. As Lise continues her monologue, her anecdotes increasingly separate into the good and bad of Europe. Some statements are harsh reminders of the evils that exist in the world because of Europe, while other statements solidify the continent's shared collective culture and identity.

> I am the worst music you have ever heard

at the Eurovision Song Contest

I am the rise and fall of communism

I am NATO bombing Serbia

I LOVE genocide

In the middle ages I had my own ISIS, it was called

the CATHOLIC CHURCH (38)

The lack of flow between the statements forces a confrontation with all of the material on the same terms. The capitalized phrases once again invoke the concept of online "scream-discourse." Words such as "LOVE," "ISIS," and "CATHOLIC CHURCH" are capitalized in order to indicate that Lise's statement are mimicking contemporary uses of languages, such as online exchanges, which frequently use terms like "LOVE" to shift focus to the subject of the statement by employing the dramatic flair of capitalization. The sentence about "ISIS" and the "CATHOLIC CHURCH" reflect how individuals weaponize online political discourse, attempting to demonstrate knowledge of historical and cultural contexts in order to be perceived by their peers as enlightened. The use of capitalization to draw attention to exchange about current events mirrors the ways in which people produce and spread their own forms of unvetted information; present-day conflicts often play out on social media, and use of capitalized letters is closest an online profile can come to displaying anger and aggression. Such dramatic calls for attention in this segment make confrontation with Europe's violent past unavoidable for the audience. While reading or listening to this monologue, one cannot reminisce about years of entertainment through the Eurovision Song Contest without being confronted with Europe's legacy of genocide in all parts of the world. The positive remarks are almost canceled out by the stark realities; however, the stark realities cannot be eliminated by talking about European

culture, art, and music. This effect of asymmetry between statements forces the contemplation of Europe's whole story and eliminates the possibility that the audience could only pay attention to pleasant parts of history, the pieces that are easier to digest. Lise's statements permanently intertwine Europe's reputation of prosperity and high culture with the grim reality of the oppression, murder, and exploitation that it inflicted on the rest of the world. In order to answer the question of Europe's twenty-first century identity, one must employ the technique of self-critique to the legacy of the continent.

The arbitrary rhythm of Lise's statements mirrors the pace and confusion of Europe's rapid changes in the present-day. Europeans are frequently left not knowing what they should think of the world in which they live. The major questions of the day center around the perceived loss of European identity, tradition, and values, as the many characters of *FEAR* express. Lise's monologue questions whether any true certainty about Europe has ever existed. For some characters, Europe is the land of "high culture, art, Beethoven, Shakespeare, and world heritage," and for others, it is "thousands of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea" (38), as Lise/Europa says.

In "I Am Europe," Europe has always been changing, and Europe has been many things at once. Lise's monologue dislodges arguments about "European values" and "European people." It also picks apart Europe's historically elitist worldview, once responsible for philosophies that ravaged the world, like Social Darwinism and the White Man's Burden. For hundreds of years, Europeans believed that their Western culture *was* culture. According to "I Am Europe," this attitude still exists.

> I want world peace I want to talk about the climate I want to save the whales I want to sign a petition I want us to be nice and open minded and talk about things and I want

> everybody to accept everybody and I don't want any religious freaks I don't want TOO MUCH CONFLICT (39).

This text points out the European perception that their world is separate from the places in the world where conflict is occurring, and insists on that separation. Some of *FEAR*'s characters have lived experiences that force them to think of their lives in the context of global conflict, whether they witnessed Germany's complicated reunification or grew up in the prosperous twenty-first century. In the postwar Western world, Europeans have been able to remain distant from real violence, but now, "I Am Europe" characterizes the era of mass migration as the historical moment when the legacy of violence masked by Europe's "great culture" comes crashing home. The physical distance between peaceful Europe and the war-torn regions of the world has disappeared. For the first time in their memories, Europeans cannot create distance between themselves and the global South, the perceived opposite of their utopia of social welfare, universal education, vibrant arts, and enlightenment.

The text of *FEAR* both separates itself from and takes part in the classic picture of European "high culture" and the traditional elitism of the Western theater-going scene. Richter purposefully surrounds his audience in urban shrubbery, writhing piles of zombies, and videoclips of screaming Catholic extremists. The actors randomly start singing songs and ranting about their favorite gory TV series. In this setting, the playwright challenges his viewers to confront their own perceived enlightenment, even as theater-goers in one of Europe's most liberal cities. At the same time, *FEAR* embraces theatrical traditions that were once considered deviant but are now included in the lineage of German artistic tradition. The play cannot be detached from the elite theater-going population of Europe who attend such performances because they want to see a boundary-pushing piece of art. The avant-garde style, however,

allows Richter the space to expand on previous trends of experimentation to use new techniques, such as staging a pile of screaming zombies, that create social disruptions for a new age. Avant-garde theater is also the art form that most insists on criticism of the self. Nobody in *FEAR*, actor nor audience member, is exempt from participation in arduously working through their own thoughts about the state of contemporary Germany. The process of watching or reading through *FEAR* is accompanied by the challenge to revisit the ways in which individuals interpret both European and German identity.

This process includes the critical step of critically considering the use of social media, internet searches, and sensationalized media to help them reach their conclusions. The age of instant information provides an environment in which far-right talking points thrive through the popularity of "scream-discourse" and the presentation of impulsive online rants as forms of information for the easily convinced. The script for *FEAR* incorporates a diverse array of literary genres and technical media within the text. Although notes from the playwright specify that any company presenting his play may rearrange the different sections in any order they please, I approached my reading of *FEAR* in the order that the scenes appear in the 2017 publication of the collection *I Am Europe*. The first scene is the projection of a videoclip from a PEGIDA rally entitled "Mein Land heiβt Deutschland." In this video, a rally-goer explains his rationale for being at the march; in particular, he seems to be responding to an unspoken accusation. He says, "Ich will einfach zeigen, dass ich Deutschland mag, dass ich für Deutschland einiges tun werde, und will mich auch nicht an irgendwelchen rechtsradikalen Dingen beteiligen. Ich steh einfach für das Land als Deutschland" (16). [22] Richter wanted to showcase these types of opinions in *FEAR*, the opinions of people who march alongside far-right, anti-Islam extremists, because

[22] Richter, Falk. "FEAR," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 16.

those being interviewed try to play down their presence at the rally as much as possible. PEGIDA stands for – in English - Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident. They are widely regarded as a radical right-wing group in present-day Germany, and the argument could be made that the subject is distancing himself from this association in the interview. This protestor says that he doesn't want to take part in right-wing radical "things."

In 2018, *Taz* contributor Philip Meinhold pointed out that modern neo-Nazis do not like being called Nazis. He writes, "*Denn die Nazis haben den Ruf der Nazis so versaut, dass nicht mal mehr Nazis Nazis sein wollen*," which just about translates to: "Because the Nazis screwed up the reputation of Nazis so much, that even the Nazis don't want to be called Nazis anymore." [23] The term "Nazi" – which is defined by devotion to German nationalism – intrinsically discounts the international far-right's recent efforts, through groups like PEGIDA, to preserve a white, Christian European continent, rather than white, Christian nations. [24] However, *FEAR* weaponizes the Nazi parallel to invoke the national memory of its German audience and present them with a period of time in which the full potential of far-right ideas of violence and racial purity was discovered. The Third Reich carries a reputation that no German person wants to be associated with, and Richter alludes to this very concept through his inclusion of videos of such protestors in *FEAR*. Another videoclip – a scene called "Ich bin kein Nazi" – shows the audience another PEGIDA-goer, who speaks similarly to the other, but is very clear about the lens through which he would like to presented in the media, which he calls the "Lügenpresse" at end of his interview. [25]

[23] Meinhold, Philip. "Nazis in Nadelstreifen." *Taz.* 17 March 2018. https://taz.de/Die-Wahrheit/!5489358/
[24] Bieber, Florian. "How Europe's Nationalists Became Internationalists." *Foreign Policy Magazine.* 30 November 2019. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/30/how-europes-nationalists-became-internationalists/
[25] "Lügenpresse" was a common term used to vilify free-press journalists as the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s.

> Ich habe keine Angst, ich sehe einfach nur Deutschland in Gefahr. Äh, also ich habe Angst im Prinzip davor, dass diese Islamisierung Überhand nimmt. […] Und im Wesentlichen geht es mir darum, dass ich nicht als Nazi beschimpft werden möchte, ich bin ein ganz normaler deutscher Bürger. Ich bin kein Nazi (35).

Both subjects actively want to portray their opinions as normal and simple, which plays well into the calling cards of groups like PEGIDA. Many people who show up at their events aren't official members of the organization; by including these videoclips, Richer asserts that these rally-goers are mostly concerned citizens who've thought too simply about the very complex presence of refugees from the Islamic world in Germany. The interviewees are attempting to make themselves sound as normal as possible, and as *FEAR* alludes, they are vocalizing thoughts that most ethnic Germans have at one point or another about the demographic changes in their country. Richter continues to include instances of protestors denying their right-wing affiliations, because he wants to demonstrate the ease at which "average Germans" can become attracted to ideas like *die Islamisierung von Europa*. The playwright displays this part of his argument in multimedia format on a giant backdrop screen that practically invades the audience's comfortable distance from the stage. This introduces the text's criticisms of instant digital information and its consumption.

The inclusion of bright, enlarged multimedia clips and "scream discourse" throughout *FEAR* – and other plays in *I Am Europe* – exhibits the inescapable nature of today's "information" systems. The flow of information, according to *FEAR*, is constant and disconcerting, because there are infinite sources for individuals to observe on the internet. Characters unabashedly present the audience with shallow, poorly-researched half-truths about refugees receiving special privileges from the German government, and in this way, mindless observation of information, in

particular, becomes a major concern of the play. *I Am Europe* especially mocks the use of social media as a news source throughout the collection by including scenes where characters reveal that they learned a piece of information from a "Facebook post" or an "internet search," then struggle to provide any further details or context about their claims. *FEAR* boldly associates widespread far-right talking points with anxious and fearful Germans' inabilities to properly analyze and question the uninterrupted surges of information that the average person faces each day. During intermittent scenes, many with multimedia clips and interview reenactments, characters' thoughtless parroting of repeated right-wing ideas effectively exposes the missing foundation of facts and analysis in the popular right-wing stream of thought. Through the rise of baseless information on social media platform, unofficial webpages, and online groupthink – an information base that has been expanding since the dawn of the internet – fear of the social changes in contemporary Germany is more easily spread and consumed. Far-right political movements have achieved easier access to the populations that are most likely to be receptive to nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric. For young far-right sympathizers especially, this is the first time they encounter a group of people that can put their violent thoughts about refugees and immigrants into words. Older sympathizers, however, are reading far-right talking points that have always existed – in both fringe and mainstream forms – but have simply taken different shapes depending on the identity crisis and migration wave of the era.

The scene "Zerbrochene Landschaften" consists of a monologue spoken by Kay, the one middle-aged actor in a predominantly millennial cast. Although the characters do not follow a traditional arc of development, they do consistently represent a "type" of German citizen throughout the course of the play. For example, Kay embodies the Cold War generation that experienced the collapse of an entire society and the uprooting of their everyday life in the name

of unity. He recalls the former East Germany – not directly – but his monologues allow the audience a glimpse of Kay struggling to balance his memories of the German Democratic Republic with his perception of the world today. The monologue "Zerbrochene Landschaften" begins with Kay's description of a former East German suburb in decline in the 2010s, with contemporary German chain grocery stores scattered about, but no young people, especially no young, intelligent women, are anywhere to be seen. [26] According to Kay, anyone who wants something from their life has left the town in former East Germany. He rants that the middle-aged men who inhabit the town now are slobs who are "bullnecked," have "strange yellow" skin (30), and do not express any emotions. [27] Nobody wants them here, Kay claims, in this instance describing ethnic Germans who have always lived in former East Germany. The middle-aged men sitting around symbolize, for Kay, the loss of livelihood and purpose in his town, and he admits that he wants to build a wall around them because he internally blames the decay of the east on their inability to assimilate into and contribute to a unified Germany. [28] Kay now sees Europe – like former East Germany – in decline, and he uses his experiences in the dissolved German Democratic Republic as the point of comparison. Through Kay's perspective, the people who live in this region exist in a place that once had meaning, but that meaning was eradicated by a collective East German feeling of disappointment during the reunification process in the early 1990s. Many GDR citizens had believed that the two different Germanys would be combined with equal preservation of their societies, but instead, East Germany was absorbed into the Bundesrepublik and integrated into the capitalist existence. Kay mourns the loss of identity

[26] This "type" of young woman who has left eastern Germany in search of a more prosperous and exciting life is referenced again in *Verräter*.
[27] We know that inhabitants of Kay's town are not Asian, because he details that the "yellow" is not so much associated with the skin color, as it is with the lack of emotion and livelihood.
[28] Richter, Falk. "FEAR," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 30.

that East Germans experienced then and brings into the present-day through his frustration about what seems to him like the prioritization of help for Middle Eastern refugees over help for East Germans. His character is still struggling to find a real sense of belonging and purpose in contemporary Germany, years after the *Wende*, and he laments this persistent lack of identity that both Kay and the "bullnecked" men in the grocery store parking lot grapple with:

> wieso will uns niemand? wieso verachten uns alle? wieso leben wir nicht? WER SIND WIR? was ist das dieses deutschsein deutschland deutschtum an dem wir uns so festklammern WAS GENAU IST DAS? WO ist das in uns? wo genau, wo genau, hier? hier? was genau ist das: HEIMAT? (31)

Heimat is a term that shows up in many places throughout *FEAR*. The actors improvise around the term at the very opening of the play, and numerous scenes involve characters feeling safe in their houses, carefree at their family summer homes, and proud of their German homeland. [29] But Kay is not secure in his German-ness, and so wrestles with the basic meaning of the word. Other characters use anecdote to build Germany up as a young nation that has grown out of a difficult history to become a land of tolerance and multiculturalism, but Kay feels no connection to this Germany. In his cry "WER SIND WIR?" he references the popular slogan of the 1989 demonstrations for German reunification, "WIR SIND DAS VOLK," a phrase that called invoked the voices of two German countries that wanted unity in their shared heritage. Kay still struggles to feel truly German, because this moment of hope was dashed when East Germans were forcibly absorbed into a capitalist society that they did not culturally identify with. The other actors, all younger than he is, grew up in a unified Germany. Meanwhile Kay comes from a place that no longer exists and yet once considered itself to have inherited the positive aspects of

[29] Richter, Falk. "FEAR," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 15.

"Germany." When the two Germanys were reunified in 1990, the East was freed from the control of the domineering Socialist Unity Party; however, the people faced issues that they had not encountered in fifty years, such as unemployment, homelessness, and capitalist competition. Kay still feels the reverberations of the culture shock that he and millions more East Germans faced two decades ago. His community has been isolated, and in "Zerbrochene Landschaften," Kay expresses that he is incapable feeling connected to contemporary Germany. The massive demographic changes brought about by the influx of refugees from war-torn regions of the global South only advance his internal confusion:

> und jetzt kommen alle diese jungen energiegeladenen männer die sich aus den kriegsregionen dieser welt herausgekämpft haben, sich durchgeschlagen haben mit ganz viel energie ganz viel einsatz alles riskiert und sich gegen alle widerstände ihren weg GEBAHNT haben hier her nach DEUTSCHLAND IN UNSER LAND und das sind alles junge manner ausgerüstet mit modernsten HANDIES (31)

Kay frets both over the flight of ethnic Germans from these deteriorating suburban landscapes in the East and the arrival of refugees who actively want to be in this part of the world. To him and other former East Germans, the lifestyle of their youth couldn't seem further away. He and his fellow citizens don't feel the privilege that a person living in the West should feel. Kay watches the refugee from some of the most dangerous parts of the world arrive with brand-new cell phones, and even this small detail exposes his bitter attitude towards foreigners who have acclimated into his home country, while the people who have lived in this land for decades are still recovering from the extinction of the East German way of life. Kay fears that these young non-German men, who are "full of energy" and technologically skilled, are replacing the German youth have left their hometowns. Such changes yield evidence of the passage of time and deep

societal transformation, Kay sees this especially through the arrivals of foreigners to take the place of those who have left. His *Heimat* has now become unrecognizable, and his words "DEUTSCHLAND IN UNSER LAND" reflect his frustration that Germany is becoming these newcomers' country when, after two decades, it is not even his.

Through the scene "Zerbrochene Landschaften," the audience becomes acquainted with the reasons why the German from the eastern states feel unimportant and ignored. This is a group of people to whom conservative values and ideologies appeal out of a desire to reclaim their way of life. Kay's monologue reveals that those who lived the last years of the Cold War never fully found their identity in the post-1990 global, capitalist Germany. This scene exposes the reality of former East Germans struggling with the concept of innate German-ness while also watching their "home" disappear year after year; in a way, Kay's words generate cause for sympathy with East Germans who want things to go back to the way they were. The text, however, rejects any sort of binary that may arise in this instance by putting unabashed xenophobia on display. *FEAR* wants the audience should see more than just a complaining middle-aged man or an ignorant racist. While one can feel some sort of connection to Kay throughout his struggle to find "home," the text also forces the viewer to confront the damaging rhetoric that this character uses to talk about refugees. He claims that they are cheered on like "Olympic champions" as they arrive at the train station in Germany, and he expresses his anger that the East Germans – who might as well have come from another part of the world when they integrated into West Germany – never received such recognition or attention. Kay's comments are not put in context, as most rants are not. While his perspective grants the audience insight into prominent political feelings held in the eastern regions of Germany, the xenophobic elements of Kay's monologue are still abundant. He shows no desire to understand the experiences of refugees from war-torn lands; he does not try to

emphasize with these immigrants through a shared connection of feeling like a stranger in a new land. Kay's fear of foreigners redefining his homeland embodies a common "justification" for xenophobia among those who yearn for life in eastern bloc. People from all parts of Germany, fundamentally cannot understand that people are fleeing for their lives, risking everything and leaving behind their homes to seek safety. Monologues like Kay's stir up reasoned empathy for former East Germans, but the context of *FEAR* challenges the idea that a person can reasonably disdain asylum-seekers searching for a safe place in the name of feeling overlooked by their government. Kay ends "Zerbrochene Landschaften" with an anecdote about a documentary he watched about the migrant integration process in Germany; according to this film, immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries lose all culture and never assimilate into German society. He describes scenes of immigrant men doing nothing in their "slums", just "sitting around and snorting glue" (31). Kay's conclusion has the possibility to be that statement of empathy. He can relate to the loss of culture and lack of purpose in a new land, but instead of comparing the landscape of his decaying hometown to the landscape of Arab neighborhoods, his rant fizzles out into another shallow desire to pursue an easy solution and remove these people from society altogether. Kay is not meant to be a tragic figure, and "Zerbrochene Landschaften" is not meant to be his elegy. This monologue supports *FEAR*'s rejection of political binaries by presenting a character who is not completely enlightened or completely problematic, but somewhere in the middle – like most Germans.

Kay continues into another monologue directly after "Zerbrochene Landschaften," and the scene transition is indicted by a change in the backdrop. The stage directions state that: "ein Foto von Heiner Müller erscheint." Although he is still the struggling East German of his previous appearance, Kay's tone changes significantly in this monologue, trading anger and frustration for

evident nostalgia. This scene is entitled "Mensch Heiner," which can best be translated to mean "Man, Heiner." This is a one-sided conversation between Kay and his intellectual muse, Heiner Müller, who is significant for many reasons. First, Müller, as mentioned previously, could be considered a predecessor to Falk Richter in the world of socially disruptive theater. His avant-garde, similarly fragmented plays addressed the sociopolitical environment of the final years of the GDR and the initial years of the Wende, just as Richter's plays are constructed to address the twenty-first century. Like Richter, Müller's works generated lots of discomfort and mixed feelings in the critiques immediately following the production; however, years after the first stagings of Müller's best-known works, like *The Hamletmachine*, they are frequently regarded as some of the most important artistic works of the former GDR. [30] As Kay wrestles with the hole left in Germany's intellectual scene, so wrestles Richter with the tradition of Müller. One interpretation of "Mensch Heiner" could conclude that Kay is merely a stand-in for Richter himself, a playwright in need of inspiration for a play that will encompass what Müller aimed to do with his work: stage a social disruption. Kay laments the loss of such powerful East German intellectuals, specifically in a theatrical context. The first words of the monologue are:

> mensch heiner sag doch mal was sag doch mal was zu der situation gerade du hast das ja alles schon vorweg geahnt GESAMMELTE IRRTÜMER TRAGÖDIE DER DUMMHEIT du hast auch einfach immer so geile titel wieso sind diese DDR intellektuellen nie zu wort gekommen die sind verschwunden als seien die in großen lagern versteckt gehalten worden bis zu ihrem exitus stattdessen sind da jetzt beate zschäpe und frauke petry und diese WIR SIND DAS VOLK PEGIDA TYPEN (32)

[30] Barnett, David. "Resisting Revolution: Heiner Müller's Hamlet/Machine at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin, March 1990." Theatre Research International 31, no. 2 (2006): 188–200.

The "amazing titles" – *Gesammelte Irrtümer* and *Tragödie der Dummheit* – are drawn from Müller's 1990 interview with the newspaper Der Freitag. [31] Richter frequently publishes similar "conversations" with academics and writers, which could be another way in which he grapples with the public-facing tradition of Müller. The end of this quotation ("WIR SIND DAS VOLK PEGIDA TYPEN") refers to "Zerbrochene Landschaften," where Kay bitterly describes the current characters of East Germany as lazy and unambitious; he sees the region as the stagnant part of a young country recently united, but in contrast, the East Germany of Kay's memory was a place of creation and stimulation. His nostalgia extends further than the everyday atmosphere of East German towns to the intellectual contributions of the late GDR that so captured the spirit of the times – the anti-regime protests, the desire for social democracy, and the hope for a productive unification of West and East. Kay does not see the same levels of artistic energy from East Germany today, a land which he perceives to be overrun with the "WIR SIND DAS VOLK PEGIDA TYPEN." [32] One must also consider that Kay's view of Müller has being established in the same age when his works were deemed important and influential by scholars; we have no proof that Kay held Müller in such high regard in the years when the playwrights works were met with discomfort and confusion. Nevertheless, Kay has decided that Germany today needs a Heiner Müller to help them unravel the twenty-first century. At the same time, this monologue makes the audience conscious of one of *FEAR*'s functions: to serve as today's Müller-like social disruption, a force of self-critique and reflection for the masses. In Kay's eyes, it is not enough. According to him, Germany needs a piece of art that will reform an entire nation; in his eyes,

[31] "Eine Tragödie der Dummheit. Ein Gespräch mit René Ammann für 'Freitag', 16.11.1990." In: Müller, Heiner: *Gesammelte Irrtümer 3. Texte und Gespräche,* Frankfurt/M. (1994), 109-120.
[32] Richter, Falk. "FEAR," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 32.

Müller's works were capable of achieving such a feat, and he calls upon the late playwright for what he sees as a solution to Germany's current struggles.

Although Kay felt intimidated by and fearful of the presence of Middle Eastern refugees settling in eastern Germany during his previous monologue, he uses "Mensch Heiner" to distance himself from right-wing extremists, reinforcing the characters' nonconformity to political binaries. Kay exists as a member of a generation raised to hate fascists, but he's still resistant to demographic changes in his country. His political thoughts are further revealed in his monologue:

> heiner Mensch der NSU konnte jahrelang morden ohne dass irgendeine staatliche stelle sich ernsthaft darum bemüht hätte, die mörder zu fassen. wenn wir mal vergleichen wie die große koalititon damals im deutschen herbst 1977 gegen die RAF gekämpft hat – der gesamte staatsapparat grif zu, ausnahmegesetze, straßensperren, sondergefängnisse, isolationsfolter, isolationstrakte (33)

Kay refers to the "German Autumn" of 1977, during which members of the Red Army Faction – a left-wing extremist group - kidnapped and assassinated BRD government officials, then were subsequently imprisoned and terminated. In this particular excerpt, Kay criticizes the ways in which the state mercilessly hunted down the far left, but in his view, hasn't lifted a finger to the inhibit the growing threats right-wing extremists' movements over the past several decades. He infers that the nature of the German state is inherently skewed towards the right-wing and historically has been. Although Germany claims the status of a social democracy, Kay represents a conglomerate of East Germans who still believe that the *Bundesrepublik* is not as anti-fascist as it should be. At this point, Kay has lost hope that their democracy will somehow intervene to resist the upsurge of far-right politics. The public must be moved to action, he asserts, through

the power of a radical piece of art, but he's hopeless in this regard as well. From his perspective, Heiner Müller and the great East German intellectuals, the ultimate fighters for true equality in society, have disappeared – replaced by middle-aged bullnecked men who sit around in empty villages doing nothing with their lives.

While this monologue's focus remains on the fading intellectual epoch of the GDR, "Mensch Heiner" exhibits some forms of social commentary beyond reminiscence. This time, the text does not explicitly address problematic and biased perspectives; the lines themselves are characterized by prejudiced undertones. During one part of his elegy, Kay expresses frustration surrounding the famous East Germans of the twenty-first century: Beate Zschäpe, Frauke Petry, and others. These AfD politicians appear consistently throughout the course of *FEAR*, positioned from start to finish in monologues, dialogues, and media clips alike. A most obvious occurrence is a scene towards the beginning of the play called "Setcards (Netzrecherche)," during which Kay – making his first solo appearance - reveals his anti-right sentiments. He rattles off information about various right-wing politicians that seems to have been pulled word-for-word from a website page.

> frauke petry
>
> parteivorsitzende der AfD, bezeichnet die mehrheit der füchtlinge als „wirtschaftslüchtlinge", die kein asyl bekommen dürfen, ihr motto „wir schaffen das NICHT"
>
> beatrix von storch
>
> AfD-politikerin, mitglied des europäischen parlaments, gründerin zivile koalition gegen homo-ehe, gegen den euro, ihr wird vorgeworfen 98.000 euro private spendengelder ihres vereins veruntreut zu haben (25)

After these names, he lists off other controversial far-right figures, such as Birgit Kelle, Akif Pirinçci, and Gabriele Kuby, and the common thread is the notion that the politicians that Kay has decided to chastise – as a result of his limited internet research – are predominantly women. The one exception is Pirinçci, a male Turkish author whose works are widely recognized as anti-feminist. [33] Kay's choice does not reflect a lack of prominent male far-right politicians in Germany today; names like Alexander Gauland and Björn Höcke are simply missing from *FEAR*, although these figures are some of the first to emerge from a simple internet search of notorious AfD politicians.

Reprehending the women of the right-wing does not end with these two scenes. In the monologue "Die Angst Vor Dem Fremden," Alina parrots a Demo Für Alle speech from the controversial Catholic extremist, Gabriele Kuby, who makes the endurance of traditional European institutions – such as the nuclear family, the church, and the state – a major theme in her politically charged, fear inducing sermons to the public. The character adapts Kuby's persona during the rant, warning against the dangers of foreigners, homosexuality, and contemporary politics. If Europe's "value system continues to be destroyed," Alina screams as Kuby, "We shall lose everything we have worked for, we have saved, everything we have built up. There shall be no more peaceful nights for us" (49). In another monologue called "Die Herzogin von Oldenburg," Tilman addresses the audience in a tone comparable to telling a scary story, as he shares both political and personal anecdotes about female far-right politicians, including Beatrix von Storch, Gabriele Kuby, and Birgit Kelle. Tilman does not simply criticize their dangerous beliefs about education, immigration, and religion, nor does he point that von Storch is the

[33] Rosellini, Jay Julian. *The German New Right: AfD, PEGIDA and the Re-Imagining of National Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

granddaughter of Hitler's finance minister; [34] he rambles aggressively about von Storch's "hideous appearance" and implies that she has a sexual relationship with her grandfather's ghost, who inspires her hateful beliefs with lust. The character says, "eigentlich wollten wir dieses stück HÄSSLICH HASSENDE FRAUEN nennen aber irgendwie dachten wir kommt dann keiner weil wer geht da hin zu nem stück wo man nur hässlich hassende frauen zu sehen kriegt" (61).

Through each of these scenes, and many more, implicit bias against women emerges as a distinguishable theme in *FEAR*. In every monologue, the female politicians are villainized. In every situation, agency is thrust upon women in a negative light; for example, women are the ones who should be staying at home, rather than going off to the city to pursue selfish goals (as in "Zerbrochene Landschaften") and women are the politicians who are causing Germany to suffer under the violence of far-right extremism (as in "Die Herzogin von Oldenburg"). Even in "I Am Europe," Lise speaks as the voice of Europe, which continues the longtime feminization of the continent that gave the world colonization, social Darwinism, religious crusades, and world wars. A woman stands on stage and takes responsibility for the evil things in the world, adhering to the ancient European one-sex model, an ideology that labeled all women as offspring of Eve, who ate the apple from the forbidden tree and caused the world to fall into sin.

The characters who show the greatest implicit biases towards women, although they exhibit innately regressive views of femininity, are not right-wing sympathizers. Throughout the course of the play, they call for tolerance and diversity in Germany, and they reprimand the AfD, Demo für Alle, and PEGIDA for inciting violence against refugees, foreigners, and those who do not conform to their perception of traditional German values. The persisting role of gender in *FEAR* reinforces the show's roots in the German theatrical practice of self-criticism; no singular

[34] Wilmer, S.E. *Performing Statelessness in Europe.* Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018.

character is without fault in their thoughts about twenty-first century, because the text depicts the real world in which every person has evolving viewpoints and implicit biases. The characters don't exist in binaries of "socially tolerant" and "socially conservative," because the West is still filled with racial and gender inequities, even in nations that claim to be the most advanced and developed in the world. Characters in *FEAR* who present their views as tolerant and enlightened are often the figures who are expressing disgust for "ugly" influential women and reprehending female politicians far more than their male counterparts. These inclusions of gender bias throughout *FEAR* and the rest of *I Am Europe* add another lens through which the audience can view an individual's consistently imperfect views. The underlying presence of bias towards women serves to further communicate that no person is above self-critique or fully devoid of implicit prejudice.

FEAR was Richter's first play in the *I Am Europe* series, and one could argue that the show's reception by the public – politicians, critics, and audiences alike – inspired the continuity of the collection. In an interview with Joseph Pearson, Richter explains:

> I felt like I needed to be more direct this time. More political than usual. German society is shifting. Fascists are coming back. I wanted to react immediately and strongly. In this sense, it is new and different. And it started a new cycle in my way of working. *FEAR* was the first of a number of works that deal with the cultural and political identity of Europe and the people who live here now on this continent in its post-colonial era. [35]

FEAR inspired a change in Richter's artistic direction and reputation as a playwright. In his interview, he references his earlier, noticeably different works that mixed fictional – often

[35] Pearson, Joseph. "FEAR and the German Far Right: Conversations with Falk Richter." Schaubühne Theorie. 23 June 2016. https://www.schaubuehne.de/de/blog/fear-and-the-german-far-right-conversations-with-falk-richter.html?offset=70&offset=30

comical – narrative with social commentary. The publication of *FEAR* steered him down a completely different stylistic path – one that broke through societal routine to convey a sense of urgency in the need for critical self-reflection on the part of each individual.

One could argue that there are many things that *FEAR* doesn't do. In striving for separation from the typical elite "high culture" of the German theater scene, *FEAR* ironically aligns itself with the decades-old tradition of staging new kinds of loud, abstract social intervention, the very tradition that bestowed with Germany its gilded theatrical reputation in the Western world. The text also largely ignores the far-right movements of the postwar period, focusing instead on the motif that the zombies of ideas that died in 1945 are now coming out of their graves. One notable exception to this argument is in "Mensch Heiner", when Richter's character Kay claims that far-right terrorists were let off the hook by the West German government throughout the 1970s, while the Red Army Faction faced a severe crackdown. The text's references to 1945 and the twelve years of the Third Reich, however, do make for a more effective warning about what these traditional, restrictive perceptions of German-ness can look like in their most extreme forms. In *FEAR*, the ghosts of Nazi Germany are wielded as the most effective rallying cry against dangerous far-right ideologies.

There also are many things that *FEAR* does do. While the play packs a compounded abundance of ideas about social change, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and migration, the show adequately serves as a catch-all introduction to Richter's migration-era performances. This 2015 text introduces viewers to issues of right-wing political movements and the blanket problematic danger of confining Germany to "family values" and white Christendom. In the following four plays – *Je Suis Fassbinder, Citta del Vaticano, Safe Places, and Verräter* – Richter elaborates on four themes that tie into the greater question of Germany and its place in twenty-first century

Europe: artistic response to political unrest; the historical influences of Europe's institutions; massive demographic changes; and, cosmopolitan identities of non-conformity. I will elaborate on each of these themes – one per respective play – in the following analyses. *FEAR*'s underlying commentary on race and gender also become common threads throughout the remainder of *I Am Europe*.

Je Suis Fassbinder: Artmaking in Response to Social Change

If Kay's artistic muse during times of political tension is Heiner Müller, then the character Stan in *Je Suis Fassbinder* feels similarly about the West German filmmaker, Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Stan idolizes him to the point of fully pursuing the man's own mission. He tells the audience:

> Ich bin Fassbinder,
> und ich mache jetzt ein Remake von Deutschland im Herbst 2016.
> Terror und Ausnahmezustand in Frankreich,
> In Deutschland drängen die Enkel der Nazidiktatur wieder an die Macht […]
> Polen ist bereits keine Demokratie mehr.
> Ungarn entwickelt sich zu einem mehr und mehr faschistischen Regime.
> Russland ist mit Putin wieder eine kriegstreibende Diktatur, in der kritische Journalisten und Künstler verfolgt, eingesperrt, umgebracht werden.

The original 1978 *Deutschland im Herbst* was a film created by a collaborative of BRD filmmakers, Fassbinder among them, in response to the events of the German Autumn in 1977 (addressed in the "Mensch Heiner" monologue). These artists noticed authoritarian trends in the West German state that paralleled fascism in the 1930s and 40s, and they each contributed a

segment to the film. [36] Fassbinder's is the longest at twenty-six minutes, and this is the artistic response that Stan obsesses over in order to make sense of twenty-first century Europe. He compares the anxiety and anger of Fassbinder's time – when the German government overtly sought to annihilate left-extremists – to rise of right-wing movements in the 2010s fueled by the mass arrival in Europe of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. In both cases, widespread fear drove the public to grow more comfortable with and attracted to fascist practices.

The play *Je Suis Fassbinder* follows Stan, as he processes the social and political stressors of present-day Europe by embodying Fassbinder himself. Just as Fassbinder's twenty-six minutes of *Deutschland im Herbst* are mostly filmed in a confined home setting, Stan transforms his house into the frame through which he confronts the world outside, and he pressures his family to take on the scripted roles that Fassbinder assigned his film subjects, like his mother, whose role Stan assigns to his own mother, Laurent. The two characters perform melodramatic arguments about where refugees should go if not Europe, how refugees treat women and LGBTQ+ people, loss of militaristic qualities in German men, and how Europeans have always possessed false senses of security. The issue of gender makes a more direct appearance in *Je Suis Fassbinder*. Laurent is concerned about women's safety when migrants are present, because she wholeheartedly believes that Muslim immigrants do not share Western values of social equality. (Similar perspectives are expressed by female characters later in *Safe Places*.) Throughout the course of the play, Stan is determined to capture his somewhat hasty presumptions about the other characters – Laurent, Judith, Thomas, and Eloise – for his film. He partakes in the same generational contempt that Fassbinder appeared to have for his mother in *Deutschland im*

[36] Hansen, Miriam. "Cooperative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere: Alexander Kluge's Contribution to Germany in Autumn." *New German Critique*, no. 24/25 (1981): 36–56.

Herbst; in the 1970s, young people distrusted their parents and the roles they may have played in enabling the Nazi regime, which Fassbinder puts on display during his segment of the film. He continuously questions his mother, eventually pressing her to admit on camera that she yearns for the rule of a "beloved leader"; she concedes that democracy isn't functioning in a way that makes the German people feel safe. It's difficult for the viewer to tell whether or not these are genuine convictions from Fassbinder's mother, because Fassbinder set the scene to pressure and confine, with the possible motive to get the answer that he wanted out of her. [37] Stan wants more than anything to capture a similar moment onscreen, where one of his family members basically admits that they want a return to fascism. He describes the type of admission he wants to see from them [38]:

> du weißt nicht wohin mit deiner Wut und du willst alles kaputt schlagen oder du frisst alles in dich rein bis zu diesem einen Moment und in diesem einen Moment, dann, dann bricht plötzlich alles aus dir raus UND DAS GENAU, DAS IST DER MOMENT NACH DEM ICH SUCHE. JA MACH MAL, MACH MAL, JETZT, DARAUF WARTE ICH DIE GANZE ZEIT SCHON, ABER DA KOMMT NICHTS, DA KOMMT NICHTS, HIER VON NIEMANDEM, ICH KRIEG HIER NICHTS VON EUCH GAR NICHTS. (103)

The capitalized text in this monologue exhibits Stan's spiral into a state of anger and frustration. At this point, he has become so immersed in perfectly molding his work to his ideology that he erupts in anger when he can't control the subjects of his art. Stan scolds his family for veering

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[37] Blumenthal-Barby, Martin. "Germany in Autumn: The Return of the Human." *Discourse* 29, no. 1 (2007): 140-168. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/252912

[38] The "du" in this quotation is used as a general "you." Stan is ranting about the process of trying to capture a particular moment on camera can be unfruitful, and he uses "du" both in reference to himself and generally to other people partaking in the process.

off script and disapproves of them adding their own anecdotes to his work. He corrects every person who calls him “Stan,” strictly adhering to his “Rainer” persona. The constant corrections throughout the play effectively blur the lines between script and reality – between the film that Stan is trying to produce that will decode twenty-first century Europe, and the complexity of his family’s opinions. The confusion that arises with the corrections and obsession with the script opens up the possibility that, while Stan believes his family has simple opinions about complicated situations, he too is oversimplifying his family’s concerns about safety and normalcy. Stan becomes so engrossed in the mission to create a perfect artistic representation of his time that he does not stop to truly listen to what his family has to contribute to his own understanding of contemporary Germany.

At the end of *Je Suis Fassbinder*, Stan has concluded that his family has a false perception of the past as a safe, predictable time without anxiety and confusion. He strives to separate himself from a group that, in his mind, is willing to give up anything for their own safety and a sense of normalcy, which can’t be achieved through an open democratic society. Stan also expresses frustration that his family can’t seem to understand what he’s trying to do with his script and why he’s obsessing over every detail of the production.

> ich meinte nur, dass wir, dass wir das Unrecht, dass das Unrecht in diesem System, dass wir das Unrecht in dieser Gesellschaft zerstören müssen auf künstlerische Weise. Wie? Wie wollen Sie das Unrecht zerstören? Wie soll diese Zerstörung aussehen? INDEM WIR FILME MACHEN INDEM WIR MIT UNSERER KUNST DAS UNRECHT DIESES SYSTEMS VERUNMÖGLICHEN Und wie soll das gehen? Ich weiß es nicht, ich weiß es ehrlich gesagt gerade auch nicht, Deutschland ist im Ausnahmezustand. Fassbinder will auf diese Situation künstlerisch reagieren Er filmt drei Tage lang rastlos

> und verhetzt sich selbst wie er zunehmend paranoider wird, Angst bekommt nicht mehr weiter weiß. (107)

Stan admires what he sees as Fassbinder's boundless dedication to creating art and willingness to put his own personal health on the line if it means capturing the "perfect" response to social and political turbulence. In concluding the production, he explains how both he and Fassbinder have been afraid of Germany falling back into fascism; he even implies that his observations of his mother have led him to believe that yearning for a strong, secure state is inherently German. Stan uses his final monologue to protest this notion and assert that German-ness means fighting back against the historical patterns of the 1940s and 1970s – two decades that Fassbinder believed were inherently connected. [39] From Stan's point of view, Fassbinder was more dedicated to his craft than anyone else, and through this dedication, he produced a piece of art that was like nothing that had ever come before it. Stan believes that *Deutschland im Herbst* fully captured the spirit of the times – the hysteria, the fear, and the desire for certainty in society – and this way, he wants to be the Fassbinder of his time. By being creative and making authentic films, Stan claims, German society can grow to understand the political and social turbulence of the twenty-first century. Whether Stan is creating his non-fiction work in an objective way, however, is another question entirely. I argue that Stan's production is anything but objective. After numerous pages of text, the audience does not know what Stan (or Rainer) is trying to accomplish, but they do understand that he is chastising family members who veer off script and manipulating conversations to get the answers he wants to hear.

[39] Elsaesser, Thomas. *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996. 131.

In *Je Suis Fassbinder*, striving for artistic perfection is a form of elitist response to political moments. Stan's belief in his own intellectual superiority translates into his desire to have tight control over a film that is meant to reflect real, unfiltered interactions between two generations with differing outlooks on Germany's political and social unrest. Stan situates himself as the "enlightened" party, because he argues in favor of tolerance and empathy; however, his inability to understand the people whose views he so vehemently opposes ultimately leads to his failure to fulfill his artistic mission. *Je Suis Fassbinder* is critical of Stan's inability to reflect on his own flaws and include himself in the film's critical lens. Stan only seeks to produce a winning respond to his family's right-leaning talking points, and at the end, *Je Suis Fassbinder* resolves that art cannot be socially disruptive unless equal criticism is applied across all perspectives.

Citta del Vaticano: Questioning Institutions That Supposedly Built Europe

This is the only play in the collection that doesn't have a strong focus on the refugee crisis; the era of mass migration in *Citta del Vaticano* creates context through which characters can consider the many ways in which Europe been changing. The age-old institutions that supposedly defined Europe for thousands of years – familial bonds, the Catholic Church, and western gender roles – are fundamentally transforming, and these changes cause some to panic and others to feel somewhat liberated. *Citta del Vaticano* examines the relationship that all Europeans have with the legacy of the church on their continent, and the characters – Tatjana, Steffen, Gabriel, Telmo, Christian, Johannes, and Vassilissa – share their personal backgrounds and feelings on religion. These individuals come from different countries and speak different languages, but all of them have the shared experience of some kind of Catholic influence in their life. In the first scene, the cast has a chaotic and disjointed conversation about several aspects of

Vatican City. They make a wide range of observations, mocking the tiny country full of old men who wear dresses, but enforce traditional gender roles. They talk about the ways in which they have lost faith, but still pray on occasion. They argue that the Catholic Church has been responsible for a lot of violence in the world, like the Crusades and religious wars. They rant about priests and religious figures who were revealed to be child molesters and sex addicts. To these characters, the Vatican represents Europe of the past, the type of conservative, regressive society that far-right sympathizers idolize. Vassilissa's first line of the show asks,

> Ist der Vatikan das Zentrum des alten Europa?
>
> Ist der Vatikan das Zentrum des Christentums und insofern eine Chiffre für Europa?
>
> Ist es das, was die PEGIDA-Leute und die IDENTITÄREN und die FPÖ und die AFD meinen, wenn sie sagen, sie wollen DAS CHRISTENTUM GEGEN DIE MUSLIME verteidigen? Meinen die dann, sie stehen für die Werte des Vatikans ein? Und welche Werte sind das? Für welche Werte steht er dann nun der Vatikan? Korruption, Lüge, Kindesmissbrauch? Ehe, Familie, Treue, Nächstenliebe? MACHT, ANGST, UNTERDRÜCKUNG? (117)

Most of Vassilissa's capitalized phrases are references to the talking points of prominent Christian fundamentalists of the German far-right movement. "IDENTITÄREN" and "DAS CHRISTENTUM GEGEN DIE MUSLIME" are common buzzwords used by right-wing political groups that believe that Christendom is the very foundation of European society; political figures repeat such words and phrases in order to present a form of spiritual justification for racist and Islamophobic platforms. Vassilissa's statement questions the traditional values that figures like Gabriele Kuby preach: preservation of the nuclear family, women's natural roles as homemakers, and homosexuality as a sickness that infects people. The characters talk about the

news they've read and the research that they have done, and this dialogue reveals that they've found inconsistencies between the average European's perception of traditional, family-oriented values and the crimes committed behind the Vatican's closed doors – between what the church preaches, and what it practices. The audience does not know where the characters get their information about the Catholic Church; however, their process of educating themselves on these issues are enough to haunt them to the point of obsession. The group is determined to investigate the vast history, legacy, and influence of the Vatican, an institution which has stood thousands of years through war, industrialization, and enlightenment. The Catholic Church has held power in the governments and economies of Europe, serving as an eternal constant, a representation of Heaven, through ages of rapidly changing realities on Earth. On an individual level, for each of the characters, the Catholic Church has played roles in their families and their education. They remark that they internalized shame for their bodies and sexualities through the church, and that their expectations of perfect, happy families were shattered because of unrealistic standards set by religious institutions. *Citta del Vaticano* concludes that traditional values extolled by far-right politicians don't exist; the very systems responsible for these widespread beliefs about "healthy" children and heterosexuality have never adhered to own their preaching.

Citta del Vaticano concludes in a state of simultaneous hope and hopelessness. The characters believe that nothing can change for their generation, who still feel the remnants of shame for nonconformity to Christian standards. Steffen describes the journey to find individual self-confidence in the monologue "Jesuskörper,":

> Das hat schon eine Wirkung, wenn sich eine Gruppe von Menschen hinter dich stellt und sagt: Du bist gut so wie du bist, wir halten zu dir, wir sind für dich da! Das kann schon zu einer Steigerung des Selbstwertgefühls führen. Krankerweise werden dir aber alle diese

> Komplexe, die dir in die Gemeinde weggebetet werden, dort auch eingeflößt. Man sagt dir, du wirst frei, du wirst frei, und gleichzeitig wird immer dafür gesorgt, dass da immer etwas bleibt, an dem gearbeitet werden muss. Du wirst nie ganz frei sein, du wirst nie an den Punkt gelangen, wo du sagst: Danke Jesus, jetzt geht's mir nur noch gut, jetzt können wir einfach 'ne gute Zeit haben. Nein, du bist und bleibst schuldig, du bist und bleibst ein Sünder, der's nicht lassen kann zu sündigen.

Steffen believes that a person can physically break free of the church's restrictions but can never mentally break free. While they started off the play singing songs and dancing together, the characters confess that they have deeply internalized the persistent shame they felt straying away from their families, discovering their sexualities, growing into their bodies, and accepting the complexity of their identities. *Citta del Vaticano* establishes the Catholic Church as an authoritative presence in the lives of contemporary Europeans. The institution has survived all cultural and political changes throughout the course of the continent's history, and its archaic teachings about family and individuality have permeated generations without exception. At the conclusion of Citta del Vaticano, all Europeans are capable of finding far-right talking points about "return to traditional values" appealing. Even in their denouncement of the Catholic institution, the characters are still intrigued by the way that the Vatican has remained stable and unchanged for hundreds of years. The promises of stability and fulfillment that the Catholic church offers sounds like a satisfying contrast to the fast-moving, material-driven twenty-first century – until an individual critically deduces that the "values" of the Catholic church have never been upheld, even by its leaders. *Citta del Vaticano* contends that no person is immune from the pervasiveness of the values of family and tradition – values that are weaponized by the

far-right – because the church has made it possible to believe that some things are timeless. Without a constantly-changing society, there's not as much fear.

Safe Places: Why does fear of foreigners drive us to seek "safety?"

Safe Places applies the same themes of security and certainty as *Je Suis Fassbinder* to a non-narrative performance. The characters in this play speak on behalf of collective "types" of Germans in a way similar to *FEAR*. *Safe Places* is concerned with the effects of the refugee crisis on German consciousness, at the point before the transmission of talking points becomes overtly political actions. As the title implies, this script investigates the same anxieties about safety and security that are presented in *Je Suis Fassbinder* and *Citta del Vaticano*. Contemporary perception claims that Europe is a safe and tolerant part of the world, where equality is valued and conflict is a thing of the past. "Postwar" takes on a greater meaning than simply "after the Second World War"; the young characters, many of whom grew up on a continent without conflict, perceive Europe to be beyond the practice of war. Hence, when discontent with the current political state becomes visible and violent far-right demonstrations overrun the news cycle, desire for a "safe place" – a place where one doesn't have to confront social and political unrest – becomes a natural response to fears surrounding the unpredictable atmosphere of the 21st century. *Je Suis Fassbinder* took a concrete approach to debunking false ideas about the past being a more secure time for Germans, while *Safe Places* seeks the grey space in between peoples' widespread anxiety over safety and their conscious far-right alignment.

The four main characters in *Safe Places* are Robert, Luise, Thomas, and Judith. Other figures in the script have titles, but are not named: for example, "Europa," "Die junge überforderte Frau, nachts, allein," "Der Fremde aus dem Krisengebiet," and "Das Wir, dem alles zu viel wird" all

deliver monologues. Late in the play, a few last characters appear with names to match the far-right politician they are parroting, such as “Trixie” for Breatix von Storch, “Frauke” for Frauke Petry, and “Björn” for Björn Höcke.

The presence of implicit gender bias is a strong thread in *Safe Places*, as stereotypes against women both appear in the text and define the essence of the female characters. Whenever Robert, Luise, Thomas, and Judith discuss the place of refugees in Germany, the two men embody the tolerant, enlightened perspective in favor of accepting refugees while the women are presenting as selfish, narrowed-minded, and xenophobic. The women also frequently suggest that the men aren’t actually listening to them speak. In these ways, the gendered undertones of the debate, and much of the rest of *Safe Places*, are ever-present. Robert and Thomas explain to Luise and Judith that they need to be less judgmental of people from other cultural in a new land and be more patient with the integration process. It won’t “be done tomorrow,” they say. [40] The women, like their counterparts in *Je Suis Fassbinder*, bring up concerns about the lack of respect they believe Muslim men have for women and women’s rights. They cite *Silvester 2015/16* when the Bundeskriminalamt (German Federal Criminal Police) confirmed that more than 1,200 women in cities across German were sexually harassed, and some were raped by groups of “‘Südländer’, ‘Nordafrikaner’ oder […] Menschen ‘mit dunklem Hautteint.’” [41] These events fundamentally changed the discourse on the nature of refugees and *Willkommenspolitik* in

[40] Richter, Falk. “Safe Places,” in *Ich Bin Europa* (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 155.
[41] "Silvester-Übergriffe: Polizei sucht nach diesen Verdächtigen" [New Year's Eve attacks: Police are searching for these suspects]. *Hamburger Abendblatt* (in German). 20 January 2016. https://www.abendblatt.de/nachrichten/article206943905/Diese-Maenner-sollen-an-Silvester-Frauen-begrapscht-haben.html

Germany and reinforced right-wing arguments that immigrants from Muslim-majority countries don't share "German values." [42] Luise expresses in this line in the first scene:

> Mensch, ich will mich hier als Frau frei bewegen können, ich will einfach nicht, dass dieses Land überrannt wird von irgendwelchen gewalttätigen sexbessenen Frauenhassern, die glauben, ihre rückständige Religion würde ihnen alles erlauben. Ich will nicht alles an Freiheiten und Rechten verlieren, was wir Frauen hier in den letzten Jahrzehnten mühsam erkämpft haben (157).

While the men focus their reasoning on the fact that refugees from the Middle East and North Africa have risked their and fought their way out of civil wars and failed states, the women remove agency from migrants in their arguments by only focusing on their experiences with safety. The conversation reaches no mutual understanding, because Thomas and Robert are advocating for the perspective of immigrants and encouraging the others to understand why someone would want to come to Germany; meanwhile, Judith and Luise quickly turn the conversation towards "protecting" German women from predatory men who threaten to regress the women's movement back several decades. The characters are attempting to make two fundamentally different conversations one, even when the topic of Germany accepting refugees seems to be connection holding the debate together. Judith also mourns the loss of traditional German masculinity, saying, "VERDAMMT UNSERE MÄNNER WEINEN ALLE, UND WIR SIND HIER NICHT MEHR SICHER." [43] This line removes accountability from women and places the blame for the lack of a safe society on German men. Judith's words imply that the men of the country are somehow failing to protect everyone where they have before. Both Luise

[42] Vollmer, Bastian and Serhat Karakayali. "The Volatility of the Discourse on Refugees in Germany." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugees Studies* 16, no. 1-2. (2018): 118-139.
[43] Richter, Falk. "Safe Places," in *Ich Bin Europa* (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 158.

and Judith fear that the refugees from nations like Syria, where they were driven out by violence, are bringing their civil wars here; Germany is no longer safe from misogyny and war. Robert and Thomas still express their beliefs that Germany will adjust to its demographic changes, and they use former East Germany as an example of how integration into a brand-new culture is a gradual process, although the parallel is not entirely accurate. In all of these conversations, the "enlightened" and tolerant male figures are not attentive to their female counterparts' reasonable concerns about violence against women. They frame their perspectives on violence within the elitist lens of tolerant Europe. For this reason, the women are not the only characters with problematic views the refugee crisis. While far-right talking points influence the women's perspectives, the men's arguments are inaccessible and ignorant towards those with lived experiences affected by the realities of violence and bias; in this case, the audience could reasonably understand why the women – whose concerns are consistently invalidated during the debate – are attracted to an ideology that offers a more concrete solution to their problem.

Some of the scenes in *Safe Places* that are spoken by the voices of the collective, rather than an individual, starkly emphasize the repeated themes of *I Am Europe*. One of the scenes called "Das völkische Wir, das immer lauter wird" is split between two voices that embody "Das völkische Wir / männlich" and "Das völkische Wir / weiblich," both of whom represent growing desires for a return to "traditional values" in Germany, voices that are spiraling towards unquestioned right-wing support and are seduced by the promise of normalcy in an ever-changing time. "Ich bin das Wir, das aus den dunkelsten Kellerräumen der Geschichte wieder an die Macht drängt," says the male voice (166). The phrase "wieder an die Macht," rather than implying that no far-right movements have existed in past decades, brings forward the concern that fascist ideologies are now mainstream, rather than simply existent. In the 2017 general

election, AfD won 12.6% of the popular vote, enough to gain a block of seats in the Bundestag. [44] This represented the first time since 1945 that openly far-right politicians had a presence in the German parliament; before this election, right-wing parties in Germany had been fringe movements that attracted relatively few followers and lacked the ability to appeal to massive groups of voters. The play displays the ways in which contemporary right-wing talking points are personal. They are more accessible than ever before and easy to relate to through basic internet research. The female "völkische Wir" claims that "Milliarden sind plötzlich für Fremde da, die vorher für Inländer nicht da waren." [45] Such sentiments are most impactful for German citizens who feel resentment for their government and believe that they have never seen state support, a feeling especially prominent amongst East Germans from villages in decline, like the place Kay spoke of in *FEAR*. They can physically relate to the right-wing idea that the government has prioritized strangers from a foreign country over its own people.

In another monologue called "Nowhere To Go," the voice that speaks is "Der Fremde aus dem Krisengebiet." This monologue marks the first time in the entire collection of *I Am Europe* when either the audience or the other characters have listened to a refugee perspective. The actor for this genderless role speaks on behalf of refugees in Germany who have fled types of violence that don't exist in Europe currently. Their words are relatively brief, as they stick to concise but thought-provoking questions. This monologue serves as a built-up response to all previous arguments from the other characters that exoticize immigrants and turn them into nothing more than strange people from far-away places. It is unclear whether this figure is speaking to the audience or the characters. Nevertheless, they demand to know what everyone is scared of. Are

[44] Hansen, Michael A. and Jonathan Olsen. "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election." *German Politics* 28, no. 1. (2019): 1-19.
[45] Richter, Falk. "Safe Places," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 166.

Germans scared that refugees will take away their language, skin color, tradition, religion, freedom, or safety? The "Der Fremde aus dem Krisengebiet" asks:

> Are you scared that I want to hurt you?
>
> Are you scared that I'll climb into your bed at night and FUCK you?
>
> I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm scared that I can't go to my home country and speak my home language
>
> I am scared of the same thing as you…except in my country we really do get shot we really do get killed every day, our children really do get taken away.
>
> I have NOWHERE to go.
>
> So I come to your territories for safety and you're scared of me! You're
>
> scared of someone who is running away from war, whose children got killed, you're scared of someone who has no safe place (167).

According to this character, the roles should logically be reversed. Germans should almost feel ashamed of their fear, because the real victims of the 21st century are refugees and stateless people who have watched their family members die, fled their homelands, and risked their lives to travel to a new place for nothing but the chance of survival. The voice of the migrant expresses frustration, rather than an attitude of victimhood, but still makes themselves vulnerable by engaging ethnic Germans with their own talking points about safety and fear. *Safe Places* thus makes a bold, direct connection between present-day Germans' feeling unsafe in their country and Germans' hatred of Middle Eastern refugees.

At the end, the characters representing Frauke Petry and Björn Höcke sing a German folk song called "Wir brauchen Grenzen" together that expresses a desire to keep Germany purely "German" and villainizes all who are deemed non-German. For a person who has always lived in

"tolerant" Europe, it becomes easy to believe that erecting strict borders around the continent can create a safer environment. *Safe Places* employs the experiences of Judith and Luisa, who face gendered violence, and "Der Fremde aus dem Krisengebiet," who faces racist and xenophobic violence, to establish that Europe is not safe for every person. The assumption that Europe was safe until the arrival of refugees further reveals the elitist view that many Europeans have about their corner of the world; the decision to remain in ignorance, and thus feel safe, is a privilege that people fleeing from a warzone cannot even consider, as the refugee figure explains. The only way to feel complete safety in the world is to engage in the elite privilege of ignoring every issue addressed in *Safe Places*; those who engage in society to some extent will always feel some form of insecurity.

Verräter: Introducing Diverse Identities and Perspectives to *I Am Europe*

After *Safe Places* stages the voice of the "Foreigner" for the first time in *I Am Europe*, the final installment of the collection, *Verräter,* or *Die letzten Tage*, devotes itself to the unique stories of individuals from more diverse backgrounds than the previous plays. *Verräter* is primarily composed of monologues from the different characters or dialogue between the characters as they struggle to understand one another. The characters are Mareike, from former East Germany, Mehmet, a gay man from a Berlin-based Turkish family, Orit, an Israeli Jew, Çiğdem, a lesbian Turkish-German, Knut, a gay father from an atypical family, and Daniel, an ethnic German to whom other peoples' identities are points of "fascination." *Verräter* differs from the other four plays in that it addresses the nuance of individual identity and the fragility of claiming that identity; hence, the title refers to the ways in which certain individuals can feel that they are "traitor" to their identity. In the collection *I Am Europe, Verräter* contributes insight into the

lives of individuals from diverse backgrounds, characters whose existence rejects the very political and social binaries that Richter develops throughout his plays. The characters in *Verräter* are different "types" of Germans, but unlike FEAR, these characters differ in social identities, rather than political views. There are former East Germans, second-generation Germans, immigrants who now call Germany home, and one ethnically German man who has trouble understanding the complexity of minority identity in his country. Together, these individuals attempt to piece together what it means to live in a diverse society, all through the setting of a garage band rehearsal, where all of the ideas for songs lead to the group sharing stories about family, home, and identity.

The character Daniel represents a recurring persona throughout *I Am Europe*: an ethnic German who considers himself enlightened (like Stan in *Je Suis Fassbinder*, or Robert and Thomas in *Safe Places*). He is a creative type who wants the rest of the characters to influence his artistic work, which leads him to ask his peers questions that are oblivious to the points they are trying to make about identity. Daniel tends to request that the other characters represent their Turkish or Jewish backgrounds for this sake of his creative process; meanwhile, the other individuals – Mareike, Mehmet, Orit, Çiğdem, and Knut use their speaking time to explain exactly why they can't do that. I will primarily focus on the stories of Mareike and Mehmet, because their struggles with identity best support the broad arguments I am making about the isolation of non-white, non-Christian identity groups in Germany.

Mareike is exactly the type of woman that Kay (the East German from *FEAR*) referred to in his monologue "Zerbrochene Landschaften," when he says "intelligente Frauen die sind alle geflüchtet" (30). She left her hometown in the former DDR, and she returns as infrequently as possible. While telling her story, Mareike explains:

> Ich laufe durch diese leeren braunen Felden oder auf Bahngleisen, die längst stillgelegt sind, und vorbei an Bushaltestellen, an denen nur zweimal am Tag ein Bus vorbeifährt, und es gibt kein Kino, kein Theater, kein Jugendzentrum, nur so ‘n Aldi und ‘n Netto und n’ paar Hartz-4ler, Rentner und Nazis (199).

Her recollection of her eastern German village in decline matches Kay’s description perfectly. Mareike is the young woman in “Zerbrochene Landschaften” who left for the city, because there was nothing there anymore, although her grandmother recalls the days of the DDR when all citizens had secure employment and “alles [war] scheinbar in Ordnung.” [46] Her grandmother, she says, would build the wall all over again, if it meant that their hometown wouldn’t only be a place for elderly Sächsischer and “terrorists” (refugees) arriving on buses. Mareike feels like a traitor to her identity in that she has grown apart from her family and their rural eastern German roots irreversibly. She knows, however, that she does not want to return to her old life, because she sees nothing for her in Sachsen-Anhalt but unemployment and rapidly spreading right-wing sentiments from former East Germans who want everything to return to the way it used to be. In this way, Mareike is representative of the younger generation of Germans striving to embrace tolerance and cosmopolitanism in twenty-first century Germany. Because she was born in 1986, her memories of her country only encapsulate the diverse Germany of post-reunification; however, her upbringing by an East German family assured that she was raised to believe that the condition of their surroundings was the fault of western politicians. [47]

Like Mareike, Mehmet feels torn between two sets of roots, calling both Kreuzberg and Istanbul home. He shares about his experience in his Turkish hometown during the 2016 attempted military coup d’état against President Erdoğan, revealing the violence and panic that

[46] Richter, Falk. “Verräter,” in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 199.
[47] Richter, Falk. “Verräter,” in *Ich Bin Europa* (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 202.

he witnessed with his boyfriend Christian during the uprising. He remembers the failure of the coup, saying, "Jeder kriegt eine SMS von Präsidenten Erdoğan persönlich, mit dem Aufruf, auf die Straβe zu gehen, für die Demokratie zu kämpfen. Was für eine Demokratie? WAS MEINT ERDOĞAN, WENN ER DEMOKRATIE SAGT?" (205). The use of capitalized text conveys his frustration about largescale political circumstances that, while entirely out of his control, drove him out of the city that best fit the definition of "home" for him. Mehmet describes the struggle he now faces in finding where he belongs, because he's a "traitor" to his identity either way. He lives in and can be more open about his gay identity in Berlin, but he also feels that he can be his truest Turkish self in Istanbul. At the same time, he faces xenophobia and lack of ethnic belonging in Germany, while he faces homophobia and the resurgence of authoritarian and theocratic political ideologies in Turkey. Mehmet's story adds a tone of warning to *Verräter*; he uses language that invokes the right-wing talking points included in works like *FEAR* and *Citta del Vaticano*; for example, Erdoğan's victory was accompanied by promises of a return to "traditional Turkish values." Throughout *FEAR* and *Citta del Vaticano,* right-wing politicians like Gabriele Kuby and Beatrix von Storch call for the reinstatement of Christian and German "values." Mehmet stresses the dangers of a state rallying behind religion as the foundation of the state and isolating people who do not belong in any of the desired categories. The unpopularity of secularism gave rise to homophobia and restoration of restrictive "traditional values" in Turkey, and Mehmet implies that Germany's resurging interest in the centrality of the state could isolate many inhabitants who call the land home, but are not ethnic Germans or Christians. *I Am Europe* creates a noticeable parallel between Mehmet's lament of a previously free and open Turkey and other characters' concerns about the rise of far-right populism masquerading as a Catholic reawakening in Germany. *Verräter* directly assigns the terms "theocratic" and

"authoritarian" to nationalist political movements that call for a return to religious order as a central tenet of the state.

Throughout the course of the play, Daniel – the enlightened German man – fails to understand his counterparts in many ways. He asks Orit, the Israeli Jewish character, to help him make an "daring and controversial" but "deeply intellectual" play about the Holocaust. [48] He plays on his phone while Mareike tries to talk to him about the ways in which a person can feel that they're a traitor to their identity. He accuses his peers of limiting his freedom of thought and speech when Knut asks him why he thinks *La La Land* should have won the Oscar over *Moonlight*. Towards the end of the play, in a monologue called "Der Weg der Männer," Daniel attempts to set himself apart from the "brainwashed" far-right German nationalists by mocking their aggressive use of buzzwords in discussion. The parts of the monologue that reference specific far-right talking points, such as "GRENZEN SETZEN UND VERTEIDIGEN" and "DER FRAU IHREN PLATZ ZUWEISEN," are written in capital letters as another reference to the scream-discourse of social media posts that attract right-wing sympathizers online. While the majority of the monologue is spent parroting Facebook posts that he has read, Daniel begins by explaining to the audience that scary stories about the paranormal do not fascinate him anymore. Nowadays, he's more interested in engaging with the thrill that arises from researching far-right ideologies, an interest that can only be made possible through an elitist belief that violence that does not involve him is not his concern.

I Am Europe's criticism of elitism becomes clearer through the actions and reactions of Daniel throughout *Verräter*, but especially in this scene. Daniel principally views the burgeoning far-right movements in Germany as a point of fascination and an alluring theme for a piece of art.

[48] Richter, Falk. "Verräter," in Ich Bin Europa (Berlin: Verlag Theater der Zeit, 2017), 213.

The violence of the far-right riots and attacks do not play a direct role in his life, so he interacted with extremist political from an apolitical position of privilege. His perspective stems from his "safe place" of ignorance about the realities of increasing ethnic and racial diversity in Germany. For Daniel, claiming enlightenment simply means that he doesn't like the far-right characters he encounters online and enjoys making fun of their agenda. He remains oblivious to the real, dangerous implications of extreme nationalism, which are especially potent for characters like Mehmet, Çiğdem, and Orit. These individuals claim Germany as their home, but are often at the mercy of people in positions of power who overtly believe that they fall under the label "traitor" and seek to revoke their German identity. Meanwhile, Daniel wants to write edgy, provocative plays about the Holocaust and the AfD, simply because he finds it enthralling. *I Am Europe* puts this unconscious act of elitism on full display, using the raw stories of minoritized Germans to challenge preexisting narratives about the non-traditional German identities that contribute to the country's cosmopolitan makeup. Disparate characters directly challenge Daniel's claims to enlightenment through confrontational dialogue that forces not only the characters, but the audience themselves to reflect on their own gaps in knowledge about Germans who are directly affected by rising far-right threats to a diverse society.

This thesis has argued that Richter's recent work challenges the cultural and political legacies of Europe as they manifest themselves in contemporary Germany. The five plays of *I Am Europe* challenge the notion of Europe as the wellspring of peace and tolerance, a safe and prosperous place in a world full of violence. In particular, the characters in *FEAR*, *Je Suis Fassbinder*, and *Safe Places* shatter previously established notions of Europe being the safe, peaceful zone and keeper of the world's highest culture. The themes of the monologue "I Am Europe" recur in

variation throughout the collection, because the string of concise statements about the legacy of the continent's role in the world confront the reality of Europe's brutal and oppressive history. The figures who present the monologue in its different forms recite facts that contradict each other as an invitation for the audience to reflect on Europe's both peaceful and violent inventions; the high-cultural legacies borne of imperialism, religious hostility, and world war that establish Europe as one of the first major forces of intolerance. *Citta del Vaticano* investigates the specific definitions of "traditional values" and concludes that stringent adherence to family structures has only ever made Europe an unsafe place for women from the start. The present existence of repressive institutions of misogyny, racism, and far-right nationalism throughout the continent remind onlookers that Europe is and never was a truly safe place.

I Am Europe denounces the belief that individuals' present-day political outlooks are entirely polarized. No character in any play falls perfectly within the political binaries of the entirely bigoted or entirely enlightened. Characters like Kay in *FEAR* mourn the loss of former East Germany's socialist-intellectual contributions to art and thought. He explains the need for a piece of German art that will make sense of the country's political and social unrest and define the 21st century. Kay's perspective closely borders elitism; however, he primarily argues in favor of clarity during a complex time, and he wants this clarity to come from a part of Germany that he sees is deteriorating and is bringing the morale of the country with it. Characters like Kay also possess several hidden, implicit assumptions about German identity. Kay effectively others refugees and their growing presence in Germany's formerly homogenous eastern villages. Driven by fear of his homeland's changing demographics, with the arrival of young, skilled immigrant men to work in former East Germany, Kay automatically affiliates his ideal state with the absence of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Thus, his implicit biases in favor

of white, Christian Germans defeats the beliefs that all educated individuals support the diversity and multiculturalism of Germany in the 2010s. Although characters like Kay are thoroughly knowledgeable about art and culture, they still possess prejudices as a result of their upbringing in homogenous environments, where they never interacted with different people and were never challenged to consider non-German perspectives of the world.

Third, preconceptions of "whiteness" and "Christianity" as defining traits of Europe fuel and provide cover for an updated version of violent, far-right nationalism in Germany. Richter's work is concerned with Germany as both an indicator for Europe and a unique case of societal upheaval, and for this reason, *I Am Europe* zeroes on the issues associated with assuming one single German identity. The individual stories in *Verräter* bring audiences especially close to dangers that minoritized Germans face. The personal anecdotes throughout the play generate feelings of empathy and protectiveness for Germans whose voices often aren't heard over Facebook rants and violent protests on TV. *I Am Europe* removes the sensationalism from far-right violence and focuses on the danger that ideas of nationalism, protection of whiteness, and reversion to traditional Christian values can pose for minority Germans who don't fit the far-right definition of German-ness. At the end of the collection, however, questions about the nature of diverse societies are left open-ended. *Verräter* introduces a multiple of new perspectives on what it means to claim Germany as home but not be ethnically German, and the final monologue infers that living in a diverse society means that every person does not have to fit into every category that people from their background historically have. At the end of this play, living in a diverse society loosely means that every person "betrays" or deviates from what is socially expected of them in some way.

Finally, *I Am Europe* constantly challenges the assumption of tolerant, cosmopolitan Germany to be a place of enlightenment. Richter follows in the tradition of Heiner Müller and his other avant-garde predecessors by introducing boundless criticism and self-criticism in all of his plays. *I Am Europe* is aware of its own elitist nature, as avant-garde are commonly consider too abstract and inaccessible to average audiences. These plays, however, lean into the traditions of Fassbinder, Brecht, and Müller in order to resist the characterization of avant-garde art as "high culture." Richter incorporates social media and sensation news discourse into the text and stages protests, rallies, and speeches that have previously drawn public attention. This combination of multimedia, current events, and scriptwriting makes the premise of Richter's avant-garde work directly relatable to his target audience: average Germans who are confused about their own political and social beliefs. In these plays, actors assume characters with their own names, an effect that makes the dialogue onstage seem like a conversation with the audience. No person or group is exempt from the need to self-reflect and reevaluate preconceived beliefs about German identity, "traditional values," and the real danger of right-wing nationalism, and the text of *I Am Europe* invites individuals into a space where self-critique becomes necessary in order to make sense of one's surroundings. Ultimately, this collection is series of artistic works that focus on outcome rather than aesthetic. Universal self-critique of implicit resistance to change of one's country is the desired outcome of all five plays. By staging the collective fears of largescale uncertainty and interconnectedness, in the most primitive and fragmented of presentations, *I Am Europe* stresses the need for all people to intensively reexamine their own preconceived notions and selfish reactions in a world that won't survive without such critical thought.

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